

Minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on 1 November 2022 at 10.00am by videoconference

Present: Geraldine Alexander (Chair)
John Taylor

In attendance: Don Leeson (Chief Executive)
Paul Lowe (Director of Corporate Services)
Paul Herink (IT Manager)
Angela Bryans (HR Manager)
Claire Kilpatrick (HR Manager)
Claire Webb (EDI Manager – Temporary)
Keelin Kelly (Communications Manager)
Patricia Coulter (Knowledge Manager)
Diane Edgington (Accommodation Manager – Temporary)
Christine Magill (Boardroom Apprentice)
Claire Fitzsimmons (Minute taker)

Apologies: Michelle McGinley
Lee Wilson
Paddy Ann Moore (Business Support Manager)
Oliver Murray (Executive Assistant)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly **Christine Magill** who is attending her first meeting of this Committee, and **Claire Fitzsimmons** who will take the minutes. The Chair congratulated **Claire Webb** on her recent temporary appointment as EDI Manager.

Since the meeting was not quorate it was decided to agree the previous minutes by way of correspondence. No other decisions were required at today's Committee.

1. Welcome – Introductions, Apologies and Declarations of Conflicts of Interests

Declarations of Interest: no conflicts of interest were declared.

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly **Christine Magill** who is attending her first meeting of this Committee, and **Claire Fitzsimmons** who will take the minutes. Lee Wilson gave his apologies, he had to deal with an urgent matter.

1.2 In the absence of **Paddy Ann**, **Paul Lowe** will give an update on Business Support matters.

1.3 The Chair congratulated **Claire Webb** on her recent temporary appointment as EDI Manager.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

2.1 The Chair and John Taylor confirmed the previous minutes were a true and accurate record of the meeting. Minutes to be cleared by other Committee members by way of correspondence.

Action: Executive Assistant

3. Matters Arising

3.1 With the Knowledge Management function having been in place for just over a year now and following discussion at the August meeting it was agreed to showcase its work at today's Committee meeting. This is a substantive agenda item for today's meeting.

3.2 As agreed at the August meeting EDI will now be a standing agenda item for the Committee and Claire Webb will continue to attend future meetings on that basis.

4. Finance Matters - Update

4.1 The Director of Corporate Services reported the Agency was tracking a total resource underspend of -£60k against profile at the end of October 2022, -£49k of which was in respect of employment costs. GAE expenditure was -£13k below profile.

4.2 Although still subject to NI Executive approval on pay policy, the Agency has noted the proposed recommendations for a pay uplift as contained in the Minister of Finance's statement of 11 October 2022. If implemented this would mean a pay uplift of £1400 (plus incremental pay progression) for most Agency staff representing an average pay increase of around 4.4%.

4.3 The Senior Leadership Team is planning to meet in mid-November to review current staffing arrangements and identify any opportunities to firm up some of the temporary arrangements in the structure. This will be informed by the financial position.

4.4 The Chair thanked the Director of Corporate Services for his update.

5 Draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

5.1 The Equality Diversity and Inclusion Manager, **Claire Webb** delivered a presentation on the draft EDI Strategy which was followed by a discussion. An EDI action plan up to March 2023 would be developed to accompany the Strategy.

Action: EDI Manager

5.2 The strategy has been developed around four key pillars and sets out the Agency's ambitions to progress to Level 5 on the EDI maturity model.

5.3 The Chair commended Claire on the draft strategy and for the work achieved to date in EDI. John Taylor recognised the Strategy as an ambitious piece of work which should be built around the business case for EDI. He highlighted the importance of energising the existing workforce and potential future applicants.

5.4 The Chief Executive indicated the intention to set out our ambitions over the next two years and include the EDI Strategy within the next Corporate Plan.

5.5 The Chair thanked everyone for their input and wished Claire well in finalising and implementing the Strategy.

6 Spotlight on the Knowledge Management Function

6.1 **Patricia Coulter** delivered a presentation on the role of the Knowledge Function within the Agency which was followed by a discussion.

6.2 The Chair acknowledged the work achieved to date in Knowledge Management, in particular highlighting the weekly newsletter and the importance of keeping up-to-date with legislative developments.

6.3 John Taylor complimented Patricia on what she has achieved so far but cautioned against trying to learn too much and stressed the importance of focussing on a smaller number of core areas which really bring benefits to the organisation.

6.4 The Chair thanked everyone for their input and looked forward to hearing more about the function as it continues to develop.

7 HR Matters

7.1 The HR Managers presented the HR Metrics (to end of September 2022) and highlighted the following:

- Absence rates for September show a spike in absence with a total of 109 days for the month, equivalent to an 8.69% absence rate. A lot of this is attributable to a number of long-term absences.
- Covid-related absence was no longer treated as special leave
- 45% of staff have a 100% attendance record
- Hybrid working arrangements are continuing to bed down
- Neurodiversity training for line managers is being rolled-out
- Succession Planning – Skills Matrix and Apprenticeship Scheme are each under development
- Mid-year staff performance reviews have commenced
- The Autumn pulse survey is about to be issued to staff

7.2 A discernible trend is now evident in the hybrid working figures with the number of staff not attending the office at all plateauing around 12% and around a quarter of staff spending 50% or more of their time in the office.

7.3 The Committee noted the HR Metrics at 30 September 2022. The Chair thanked the HR Managers for their update and acknowledged the importance to staff of the initiatives set out within it.

8 ICT Matters

8.1 The IT Manager reported that the telephone infrastructure has now been successfully migrated to Telephone House.

8.2 Ceox have been building a test platform in a new environment within which to deploy the CMRS phase 3 elements for testing. It is hoped that the Agency will be able to complete testing soon.

8.3 The IT Manager highlighted the support provided by Atlas Communications and CDW in helping the Agency progress much of this work.

8.4 The Chair thanked the IT Manager for his update and conveyed the hopes of the Committee that the remaining migration goes smoothly.

9 Communications Matters

- 9.1 The Communications Manager provided an update in relation to ongoing activities. It was also reported that a new year-out student placement has now joined the Agency and will spend time within the Communications, Advisory and HR functions.
- 9.2 It was noted that autumn is typically conference season and the Agency will be present at a number of stakeholder conferences to promote the work that we do. The Agency is also a sponsor to both the CIPD and Business Eye awards.
- 9.3 A number of podcasts have now been developed on workplace issues including menopause and gender identity. The refreshed format of the team brief has also been launched to good feedback. This will be further enhanced over the coming months.
- 9.4 The Chair thanked the Communications Manager for her update.

10 Business Support Matters

- 10.1 The Director of Corporate Services provided an update in relation to ongoing activities within Business Support and took the opportunity to praise **Paddy Ann Moore** who had recently taken on the role of Business Support Manager on a temporary basis. Paddy Ann has demonstrated good instincts for the role and the relevant issues and has already made good progress in a number of areas.
- 10.2 Engagement is underway with the Customer Service Excellence assessor and plans are shaping up for the re-assessment exercise in March 2023. Evidence requirements have been identified and co-ordination across the management team has commenced.
- 10.3 The Workplace Information Service customer telephone survey is expected to come on line soon.
- 10.4 Preparations are continuing for the relocation of the Business Support Team to James House, and the Business Support Manager has been co-ordinating activities in the wider Agency in relation to remaining paper records.
- 10.5 The Chair thanked the Director of Corporate Services for his update and asked him to pass on the gratitude of the Committee for the good work being done in preparation for relocation.

11 Accommodation Project

- 11.1 The Accommodation Project Manager confirmed that the Agency remained on track to relocate Head Office on 6 December 2022, which was now only five weeks away. Phase 1 has now been completed in James House, with handover of Phase 2 (including the Agency's accommodation) to DoF expected to occur tomorrow.
- 11.3 An inspection of our area within James House will take place on 7 November 2022, with signing of Licence agreements expected to take place on 7 & 17 November 2022, and the furniture build planned for 21 November – 5 December 2022.
- 11.4 Porterage meeting will take place on 18 November 2022 and everything will be relocated on 5 December 2022 including ICT Equipment, paperwork, office equipment and staff specialist chairs.
- 11.5 Staff site visits commenced at the end of October and there are further planned visits in November. Committee members were invited to participate.
- 11.6 The Chair noted that this was the last Finance and Personnel Committee meeting prior to the relocation to James House and the next few weeks would bring an intense focus on the move. The Committee recorded thanks to Diane and the Accommodation Project Team for their great work in getting us all ready for the move and wished everyone good luck for the 6 December.

12 Any Other Business

- 12.1 The Chair highlighted the intention to return to in-person meetings from February 2023 forward, with access to hybrid arrangements in the event that individuals are unable to attend on-the-day. This was welcomed by Committee Members and attendees.

Action: Executive Assistant

- 12.2 The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the meeting.

13 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on **7 February 2023 at 10.00 am in James House, room to be confirmed before meeting.**