

**Minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee Meeting  
Held on 4 September 2023 at 10.00am**

**Present:** Geraldine Alexander (Chair)  
John Taylor  
Lee Wilson

**In attendance:** Don Leeson (Chief Executive)  
Paul Lowe (Director of Corporate Services)  
Angela Bryans (Joint HR Manager)  
Elaine Clarke (Joint HR Manager)  
Patricia Coulter (Knowledge Manager)  
Diane Edgington (Transformation Project Manager)  
Patrick Quigley (Business Support Manager)  
Claire Webb (EDI Manager)  
Vicky Aldana (Boardroom Apprentice)  
Claire Fitzsimmons (Minute taker)

**Apologies:** None

This was a hybrid meeting with Committee members attending in-person and by videoconference.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly the Agency's new Boardroom Apprentice Virginia Aldana and Patrick Quigley and Elaine Clarke who were attending the Committee for the first time.

Claire Fitzsimmons was thanked for attending to minute the meeting.

**Declarations of interest:** None

## **1. Minutes of the Last Meeting**

- 1.1 Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 2 May 2023 (paper FP 01-09/23) were agreed as an accurate record for publication on the Agency's website.

**Action: Executive Assistant**

## **2. Matters Arising**

- 2.1 It was agreed that the regular Knowledge Updates prepared for staff will be shared with Board members.

**Action: Knowledge Manager**

### 3. Finance Matters

- 3.1 The Director of Corporate Services reported the financial position to date, which is an underspend against profile. Employment cost projections are being reviewed in light of delays in filling some vacant posts.
- 3.2 The Committee noted that the Agency has bid for additional capital funding to upgrade CMRS, in line with the external evaluation of the case management system.
- 3.3 The Director of Corporate Services reported on plans to create a new Financial Manager post and fill the vacant Financial Assistant post, as soon as possible.
- 3.4 The Chair thanked the Director of Corporate Services for his update.

### 4. HR Matters

- 4.1 The HR Managers provided an update on progress against the HR Work Plan for 2023-24.
- 4.2 The Committee noted the success of a number of staff in achieving promotion to the Employment Relations Manager and Officer grades following external recruitment exercises.
- 4.3 The Committee noted that the current HR priority is recruitment for the new Apprenticeship programme, which was welcomed by Board members as a means of developing talent and addressing longer term succession planning.
- 4.4 Evaluation of the hybrid working pilot is underway. Feedback from this has been positive and therefore the draft policy is unlikely to change when it is finalised. Staff networks will be consulted on the results of the evaluation exercise to ensure to identify any equity, diversity or inclusion issues.

**Action: HR Managers**

- 4.5 The HR Metrics for the period ending 31 July 2023 (paper FP 02-09/23) were noted. The Committee queried the comparatively small number of training days to date. It was confirmed that the budget for this is unchanged from previous years and a number of learning and development activities are planned. With staff appraisals now completed, a Learning and Development Plan for 2023-24 is being developed.

**Action: HR Managers**

4.6 The Chair thanked the HR Managers for their update.

## 5. ICT Matters

5.1 In the absence of the IT Manager, the Director of Corporate Services provided an update on progress against the IS Work Plan for 2023-24.

5.2 The Committee noted that cyber security penetration testing commenced in August and is due to be completed by mid-September 2023.

5.3 The Director of Corporate Services reported that, following a procurement exercise and with effect from 1 September 2023, desktop support is being delivered by a new provider. The new arrangements include onsite support throughout the day; previously, support was provided during mornings only.

5.4 The business case for migrated desktop services to IT Assist is being prepared for DfE approval. However, migration is dependent on the CMRS upgrade. This upgrade is estimated to cost £350k, spread over two financial years; funding for this is being sought from DfE.

5.5 The Committee noted that the Agency's mobile phone contract is being reviewed to ensure access to the 5G network and improve the functionality of apps.

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

## 6. Communication Matters

6.1 In the absence of the Communications Manager, the Director of Corporate Services provided an update on progress against the Communications Work Plan for 2023-24.

6.2 The Committee noted that the Communications Manager (Maternity Cover) has left the Agency to take-up a post elsewhere. With the substantive post holder expected back from maternity leave around the end of the calendar year, it may prove difficult to recruit another temporary Communications Manager.

6.3 Despite this loss of this key staff member, the Senior Leadership Team is endeavouring to maintain the momentum of high levels of media engagement, which has been achieved during the past few months. The Agency's Communications Partner is providing additional support.

6.4 The Committee noted that a Communications Student has begun their year-long placement and is focusing on the staff Team Brief and co-ordinating the Agency's social media channels. The Communications Partner is providing mentoring support in the absence of a Communications Manager.

6.5 Preparations to launch the 'Cost of Conflict' research report are underway.

6.6 The annual YouGov awareness survey has been completed. A report analysing trend data will be prepared as soon as resources permit.

**Action: Director of Corporate Service**

6.7 The Chair thanked the Director of Corporate Services for his update and passed on the Committee's appreciation to the Communications Partner for their media engagement successes and support.

## **7. Business Support Matters**

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

7.2 The Committee noted that the Business Support Manager is transitioning into the role from his previous post in Conciliation. A particular priority is training to be the Agency's Data Protection Officer. There will be a review of data protection arrangements and further staff training to help manage down the risk of data breaches.

7.3 The Chair thanked the Business Support Manager for his update.

## **8. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion**

8.1 The EDI Manager provided an update on progress against the EDI Plan for 2023-24.

8.2 The Agency had recently participated in a number of high profile events, including the Belfast and Foyle Pride parades; hosted a panel event held as part of the Belfast Pride Festival; and hosted an information stand at Belfast Mela.

8.3 The Committee Chair commented that she had been privileged to be a panel member at the Pride Festival event. It was noted that this had been hugely successful and, building on this, a similar event is being planned to focus on disability issues.

8.4 Guidance on sexual harassment in the workplace is being finalised in partnership with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. In parallel with this, staff training workshops on sexual harassment are taking place.

8.5 Preparations are being made for the third annual EDI staff survey in October 2023.

8.6 The Chair thanked the EDI Manager for her update.

## **9. Knowledge Management**

9.1 The Knowledge Manager provided an update on her work.

9.2 The Chair thanked the Knowledge Manager for her update.

## **10. Accommodation/Transformation Programme**

10.1 The Transformation Project Manager provided an update on residual matters before the Accommodation Project is formally closed.

10.2 The key current accommodation priority is identifying new Regional Office premises ahead of lease expiry in June 2024. Other outstanding accommodation matters include finalising dilapidations for the former Head Office premises and revising the Business Continuity Plan in light of relocation to James House.

10.3 In terms of the Transformation Programme, the focus has been on establishing project management governance arrangements and identifying the training needs for Employment Relations Managers.

10.4 The Chair thanked the Transformation Project Manager for her update.

## **11. Any Other Business**

11.1 There was no other business.

## **12. Date of Next Meeting**

12.1 The next Committee meeting will be on 7 November 2023 at 10.00am.