

**Minutes of the Labour Relations Agency Finance and Personnel Sub-Committee
held at 3pm on Monday, 14 March 2016
in the Agency's offices Gordon Street, Belfast.**

Present: Mr. Albert Mills (Chair) [AM]
Mrs. Michelle McGinley [MM]
Mrs. Jill Minne [JM]

In attendance: Mr. Tom Evans (Chief Executive Officer) [TE]
Mr. Gerry O'Neill (Director of Corporate Services) [GON]
Mr. Paul Herink (Employment Relations Manager (IT)) [PH]
Mr. Michael Riddell (Employment Relations Manager (HR)) [MR]

1. Chair's opening Remarks

- 1.1. AM welcomed all present to the first meeting of the reconstituted Finance and Personnel Committee. All Committee members confirmed that they had received a copy of the revised terms of reference.
- 1.2. AM placed on record his thanks to the former Chair, Sally McKee and it was agreed that the Committee should write to thank her for all her work.

2. Apologies

- 2.1. No apologies received.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 November (Paper FPM /15 enclosed)

- 3.1. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.
- 3.2. GON advised that the Chair should seek any conflicts of interest at the start of each meeting.
- 3.3. No conflicts of interest were declared

4. Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes not listed on this Agenda

- 4.1. TE raised the matter of the Finance and Personnel Sub-Committee reporting back to the Board. It was agreed that the Chair would present a written report of each meeting to the Board.

5. Finance issues (Paper FP /1/16 enclosed)

- 5.1. GON presented the finance report setting out expenditure against forecasted budget indicating a current underspend of approximately £125K of which £83k related to salaries. GON confirmed that a number of emerging expenditure items is likely to reduce the year underspend to below 2%.

- 5.2. GON also reported that plans are in place to utilise the majority of the capital budget on an office refurbishment project, upgrades to the CCTV system and new signage both in Belfast and our Regional Offices. JM suggested that any underspend should be carried over to 2016-17. GON confirmed that this should be addressed through accruals.
- 5.3. AM asked if any of the Board members had undertaken any training that had been offered and whether Board Members' attendance would have an adverse impact on the budget. TE confirmed that Board member training is a priority and is accommodated within the budget.
- 5.4. TE confirmed that a business case is being prepared for the new Early Conciliation to be delivered in the 2016-2017 and that the approval process will be very rigorous given the scale of projected expenditure. He advised that the 2016-17 budget allocation is to remain at the 2016-17 level and that the business plan is now being prepared for consideration at the April Board meeting.

6. Personnel Issues (Paper FP/2/16 enclosed)

- 6.1. MR presented the HR report providing an update on live recruitment competitions for Employment Relations Officers (EROs) and Employment Relations Manager (ERM) in the Regional Office. He confirmed that posts should be filled from June 2016. MR and TE also confirmed that there have been positive discussions with the Unions on the proposal to extend the reserve list from 6 months to 12 months for the current recruitment programme to meet the additional resources requirements for Early Conciliation.
- 6.2. MM suggested that potential candidates from the Belfast catchment may be put off by the focus on the Regional Office in terms of the ERM recruitment. TE confirmed that should the pool not be sufficient, further external recruitment would take place.
- 6.3. MR presented an overview of the draft HR People Strategy. JM suggested that there should be a specific focus on equality. The Committee commented that the HR strategy needed to be sufficiently flexible to address medium and longer term priorities. JM also noted that recent research has indicated that a focus on Recognition rather than Reward has resulted in better outcomes across organisations; but if reward is to continue to be a feature it should focus on collective/team performance. She also suggested that there should be an appropriate response to any underperformance issues.
- 6.4. MR confirmed that meetings had taken place with Advanced Coaching and another provider of Leadership and Management Training with a view to developing further our management capacity and approach to succession planning. This will include a focus on making recognition a day-to-day activity within teams rather than leaving it to mid/end year appraisals.

7. ICT Update (Paper FP/3/16 enclosed)

- 7.1.** PH presented the ICT report setting out the Agency's current and planned IS/IT activities including a graphical representation of usage of the Agency's internet and intranet. These show favourable levels of engagement including traffic from outside of the Northern Ireland. PH however indicated that this may indicate a potential hacking risk. He advised that the systems are regularly penetration tested as part of our ISO27001 procedures and that controls are in place to minimise the level of risk.
- 7.2.** PH reflected on the success to date of the roll out of the new ICMS system and the potential for data mining of the information that will be stored on the system. This information includes the information such as age, postcode, occupational sector that could identify 'hot spots' in relation to industrial relations issues. The Committee agreed that the information generated by the new system could inform the Agency's strategic direction and that the Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency (NISRA) could assist. TE agreed to engage with NISRA; MM also suggested that the Universities may be able to assist.
- 7.3.** PH indicated that there would be challenges in managing the interfaces required for the introduction of Early Conciliation and that these were under consideration from an ICT perspective. MM commented that the introduction of Early Conciliation (EC) and the Agency's ability to deliver positive outcomes through this new service is critical in terms of reputational risk. In response, TE acknowledged that the delivery of the new EC service had to be more than an administrative process and that ACAS have offered their trainers to assist in terms of any cultural change to the way we present and deliver our services.
- 7.4.** PH updated the Committee on the work of the three Belfast MET placement students developing a range of web applications to increase the range of platforms for engaging with clients; includes an app for employers to have their policies reviewed and an app for obtaining information in a more mobile phone friendly style. The idea is to reach out to a new generation of user who are more dependent on mobile phone technology but also to reach out to a demographic which might not have access to desktop PCs.
- 7.5.** The Committee liked this new focus on web applications which could reduce administrative burdens. JM suggested that the Agency should also consider placements from a new Digital Marketing course. TE indicated that he had already raised this with Belfast Met but there is also an opportunity to work with QUB/UU.

8. Agendas for future meetings

- 8.1.** GON suggested that accommodation should be a standing agenda item which was agreed. TE advised that the Agency was about to commission the Department of Finance and Personnel's Land and Property Services to conduct a Rent Review which became due in 2014. GON confirmed that there will be a provision in the 2015-16 annual accounts.
- 8.2.** TE advised that a cross-directorate group will be established to develop a specification that will inform the Agency's accommodation options post the end of the current lease in 2019. The Committee emphasised the importance of the Agency being seen as independent of Government and that this principle should inform its future delivery location.

9. Any Other Business

9.1. GON advised the Committee that there has been an ongoing issue around the unauthorised use of a copyrighted image on the old website with a liability of £900. GON also advised of a recent accident on the Agency's premises involving a contractor and that all health and safety processes had been observed.

9.2. GON also advised that all Board members and members of sub-committee should complete a self-assessment questionnaire in line with governance best practice, however given that this is a newly reconstituted committee that this may be premature and should be deferred to a future meeting. GO noted that

9.3. It was agreed to place on the agenda for the next meeting.

10. Date of next meeting

10.1. TE confirmed that Alison Wolfe would be in contact about the date and time of future meetings. It was agreed that these may take place on a separate date from the Board meetings, perhaps on a Monday and start at 16:00 rather than 15:00.

10.2. AM closed the meeting at 16:45 and thanked everyone for their participation.