

Minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on Monday 19 June 2017 at 5.15pm at the Labour Relations Agency, Gordon Street, Belfast

Present: Albert Mills (Chair)
Michelle McGinley
Jill Minne

In attendance: Tom Evans (Chief Executive)
Don Leeson (Director of Corporate Services)

Apologies: None

This was a truncated meeting to facilitate an Extraordinary Board meeting at the time scheduled for 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 27 February 2017 were agreed as an accurate record (paper FP01-02/17 refers).

2. Matters Arising from the Last Meeting

- 2.1 The Chief Executive reported on the current status of Early Conciliation (EC), which was discussed at the Agency's quarterly Accountability meeting with the Department on 13 June 2017. It was confirmed that EC remains a Departmental priority. However, the business case for funding requires Ministerial approval and is therefore awaiting the outcome of the current political talks to restore the devolved administration. The Agency has asked that the business case is submitted to the Department of Finance for review on a without prejudice basis, so that there are no further barriers to progress once Ministerial approval has been granted.

3. Finance Issues

- 3.1 The current budget position, as outlined at the preceding Board meeting, was noted by the Committee. A revised budget, which takes account of the outcome of the Voluntary Exit Scheme and other cost reduction measures, will be discussed at the next Committee meeting before it is presented to the Board for approval in September 2017.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

4. HR Issues

4.1 The Director of Corporate Services reported that four appointments (one Employment Relations Officer and three Helpline staff) had been made in March/April 2017, prior to the current budget situation becoming clear.

4.2 The Committee noted that the Agency has agreed with NIPSA to extend reserve lists for staff for EC implementation until 31 December 2017. These lists emanate from recruitment exercises conducted in 2016. The Chief Executive advised that in acknowledging trade union's agreement to further flexibility he had indicated at the JNCC that the Agency would review in the autumn the necessity for a further extension of the current reserve lists.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

4.3 The Director of Corporate Services reported that a Tribunal claim, made against the Agency in March 2017, has been withdrawn. This is included as a contingent liability in the draft Annual Report and Accounts, which is due to be approved at the next Board meeting – this reference will now be removed from the final version.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

4.4 It was noted that a draft People Strategy to support the new Corporate Plan has been developed. This will be discussed with the Senior Management Team and NIPSA. The final document will be presented to the next Committee meeting for review.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

4.5 The Director of Corporate Services reported that HSENI has completed the survey of the Agency's performance against the Management Standards for work-related stress. This included a quantitative survey, which achieved a 93% response rate from staff, and focus group discussions. HSE's report on the outcome of the survey is expected to be available in 4-6 weeks and will be presented to the next Committee meeting for consideration.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

5. ICT Update

5.1 The Director of Corporate Services gave an update on current ICT priorities. Glitches within the CMRS that had delayed the migration of historic records have now been resolved. However, the data migration will cost approximately £8k (inclusive of VAT) to complete. The Agency is writing to the Department to seek funding for this.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

5.2 Some additional amendments to the specification for Phase 2 of the CMRS will be completed this week. These include a case management facility for the Certification Office. Once these have been formally signed-off, the business case for funding will be submitted to the Department for approval.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

5.3 An IS Strategy to support the new Corporate Plan has been developed for discussion with the Senior Management Team. The final document will then be presented to the next Committee meeting for review.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

5.4 The website is being developed to allow it to be translated into the main languages spoken in Northern Ireland to improve its accessibility. In the longer term, the Agency is exploring with IT Assist what support they can provide to redevelop the website.

6. Accommodation Issues

6.1 The Chief Executive reported progress with the Rent Review for the Agency's Belfast office. The Landlord is seeking an annual rent increase of approximately £8k. The Agency is seeking to negotiate this amount down, with the support of Land and Property Services. One option being explored is to extend the length of the lease for an additional 3 years on a no detriment basis to the Agency. This may synchronise with work to appraise the Agency's longer term accommodation options, with one possible outcome being relocation onto the Government Estate when appropriate premises become available in 2022.

7. Any Other Business

7.1 There was no other business.

8. Date of Next Meeting

8.1 The next Committee meeting will be on 25 September 2017 at 4pm.