

**Minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on Tuesday 4 June 2019
at 10.00am at the Labour Relations Agency, Gordon Street, Belfast**

Present: Albert Mills (Chair)
Michelle McGinley

In attendance: Tom Evans (Chief Executive)
Don Leeson (Director of Corporate Services)
Keelin Kelly (Communications Manager)
Paul Lowe (HR Manager)
Mary O'Brien (Business Support Manager)

Apologies: Jill Minne

It was agreed that the meeting, while not quorate, would proceed given that the Committee is an advisory body.

The Chair welcomed Paul Lowe and Mary O'Brien to their first meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee.

Declarations of Interest: No conflicts of interest were declared.

1. Minutes of the Last Meeting

- 1.1 This was the first Committee meeting since December 2018. The March 2019 had to be cancelled and a suitable alternative date could not be identified.
- 1.2 The minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on 4 December 2018 (paper FP 01 06/19 refers) were agreed as an accurate record.

2. Matters Arising from the Last Meeting

- 2.1 The Committee noted that the Health and Wellbeing Strategy has been approved by the Senior Management Team and the Trade Union Side and is now being implemented (paragraph 4.10 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). The Chief Executive will provide an update at the June 2019 Board on mental health training provided to staff.

Action: Chief Executive

2.2 The Director of Corporate Services reported that all the necessary approvals for new accommodation for the Regional Office have been secured (paragraph 7.1 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). The staff are due to relocate to Richmond Chambers on 10 June 2019. The Committee noted that staff had some initial reservations about the move, particularly the condition of the new premises. However, these have now been refurbished. The August 2019 Board meeting will be held in the Regional Office, which will provide an opportunity for Board members to view the accommodation and listen to the views of staff.

3. Finance Update

3.1 The Committee noted that the audit of the draft Annual Report and Accounts for 2018-19 is nearing completion. The outcome will be discussed at the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting on 19 June. The Annual Report and Accounts will then be submitted to the Board for approval on 27 June 2019.

3.2 The Director of Corporate Services reported that Agency achieved its key financial target for 2018-19 of spending 99% of its budget. However, the underspend was greater than expected. This was because some accruals from the previous year (e.g. the cost of roof repairs following storm damage in January 2018) were lower than anticipated.

3.3 The budget for 2019-20, which is the same as the previous year, was approved at the May 2019 Board meeting. The Committee noted that the Agency has submitted a number of bids to DfE for additional funding. These are for additional employer pension contributions, employment costs for an inward secondment, an employment relations conference, planned research into employment relations models and, on DfE's suggestion, the costs of the anticipated outcome of the forthcoming Head Office Rent Review.

4. HR Plan for 2019-20

4.1 The HR Manager presented the draft HR Plan for 2019-20 for comment (paper FP 02 06/19 refers).

4.2 The Committee noted that a key priority for the year ahead is further improving employee engagement in light of the outcome of the Investors in People assessment. This is being taken forward as a joint initiative with the Trade Union Side. Terms of reference for an Engagement Group are being drawn up with a view to approving these at the next JNCC meeting. The Chief Executive reported that he is planning to invite a former Board member to share his expertise on engagement with the Group.

Action: Chief Executive

4.3 The Committee also noted that the Investors in People assessor and the TUS will be invited to the September 2019 Board meeting to discuss engagement issues.

Action: Chief Executive

4.4 The draft HR Plan will be presented to the next SMT meeting for approval.

Action: HR Manager

5. Information Systems Plan for 2019-20

5.1 The Director of Corporate Services presented the draft IS Plan for 2019-20 for comment (paper FP 03 06/19 refers).

5.2 The Committee noted that development of the web portal for Early Conciliation is a key priority. This is currently under development and will be presented to the June 2019 Board meeting as part of a wider presentation on EC customer journey maps.

Action: IT Manager

5.3 The Director of Corporate Services reported that another priority is the longer provision of IS Managed Services to the Agency. The Committee noted that the current contract is for five years, with options for two one-year extensions. The Agency has just agreed to take-up the final one-year extension, which means that the contract will end on 31 August 2020. The Agency is appraising the option of joining IT Assist. If this is not economically viable or technically feasible because of issues regarding the hosting of the case management system, then a procurement exercise will be needed. The outcome of this option appraisal will be presented to the September 2019 Board meeting.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

5.4 The Committee noted that other planned work includes the provision of laptops to all EROs to facilitate more agile working, and trialling the use of web chat within the Business Support Team for general enquiries.

5.5 The draft IS Plan will be presented to the next SMT meeting for approval.

Action: IT Manager

6. Communications Plan for 2019-20

6.1 The Communications Manager presented the Communications Plan for 2019-20 for comment (paper FP 04 06/19 refers).

6.2 A key priority will be raising awareness of EC. A separate EC Communications Plan is being developed and will be presented to the Board in due course. In the meantime, the Committee noted that the Chief Executive will be speaking at the EEF annual conference on 5 June and will announce the intention to implement EC with effect from January 2020.

Action: Communications Manager

6.3 The Committee noted that the new website has just gone live. The developers have been invited to attend the August 2019 Board meeting to report on how the website is performing.

Action: Communications Manager

6.4 Another key priority will be launching the Agency's social media channels, for which the Board approved operational guidelines in May. This has been held back until August 2019 pending the new website becoming operational and functioning well. In readiness for this, a number of videos to promote and explain the Agency's services have been produced. These will be circulated to Board members.

Action: Communications Manager

6.5 The draft Communications Plan will be presented to the next SMT meeting for approval.

Action: Communications Manager

7. Business Support Update

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

7.2 As in other areas, a key priority is readiness for EC implementation. The Business Support Team has an important role in facilitating the preparation of customer journey maps, which will be presented to the June 2019 Board meeting. Furthermore, the team will be handling the receipt of EC notifications from claimants through a dedicated telephone line, by post, or in person.

7.3 The Committee noted that the Business Support Team is leading the development and implementation of an action plan to address the findings of the pre-assessment against the Customer Service Excellence standard. This will be presented to the August 2019 Board meeting.

Action: Business Support Manager

7.4 The Business Support Team has responsibility for monitoring performance against the Business Plan, including the OBA 'dashboards'. The first report against these will be presented to the August 2019 Board meeting.

Action: Business Support Manager

7.5 The Committee also noted that, as reported to the May 2019 Board meeting, the Business Support Team is also progressing work achieve statutory recognition for the Agency as a publisher of official statistics.

8. Any Other Business

8.1 There was no other business.

9. Date of Next Meetings

9.1 The Committee agreed to reschedule the date of next meeting to 24 September 2019, starting at 10.30am.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

9.2 The subsequent meetings are scheduled for 3 December 2019 and 3 March 2020.