

Minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on 2 March 2021 at 10.00am by videoconference

Present: Albert Mills (Chair)
Michelle McGinley
Gary McMichael

In attendance: Don Leeson (Chief Executive)
Angela Bryans (HR Manager)
Paul Herink (IT Manager)
Keelin Kelly (Communications Manager)
Claire Kilpatrick (HR Manager)
Paul Lowe (Interim Director of Corporate Services)
Mary O'Brien (Business Support Manager)
Alison Wolfe (Minute Secretary)

Apologies: Sarah Livingstone (Board Apprentice)

Declarations of Interest: no conflicts of interest were declared.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was noted that this would be the Chair and Gary McMichael's last Committee meeting before their terms of office end on 30 April 2021.

1. Minutes of recent Meetings

1.1 The minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meetings held on 4 November (paper FP01-03/21) and 1 December 2020 (paper FP02-03/21 refers) were agreed as accurate records.

2. Matters Arising from the Last Meeting

2.1 The Committee noted that Daire Murphy has volunteered to act as the Board's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champion, and will mentor a staff champion as part of this. A role specification for a staff champion has been agreed with the Senior Management Team, Employment Relations Group and Trade Union Side; expressions of interest in this role will be sought from staff (paragraph 2.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

Action: HR Managers

2.2 Progress on the Recognition and Reward Policy has been delayed pending the outcome of the NICS' review of its special bonus scheme, which provides the governance framework for reward vouchers (paragraph 4.13 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). The HR Team will monitor developments.

Action: HR Managers

2.3 The Chief Executive reported on meetings with Civica to discuss outstanding issues (paragraph 5.5 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). A discounted fixed price has been agreed to complete outstanding work (see below).

2.4 Preparations are being made to recruit a Communications Manager on a permanent basis (paragraph 6.6 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). Michelle McGinley agreed at the February 2021 Board meeting to join the selection panel. The Agency is awaiting confirmation of its budget for 2021-22 before filling the post.

Action: Chief Executive/HR Managers

3. Finance Matters - Update

3.1 The Chief Executive reported that the Agency is on track to meet its financial targets for the year.

3.2 Bids amounting to an additional £1.3m have been submitted for 2021-22. The outcome of a bid for EU exit funding (over £200k) has been confirmed. The remainder of the outstanding funding is aligned to DfE's economic recovery plans, or associated with Head Office relocation.

3.3 The Chief Executive indicated that he would like to provide more security for those staff on various temporary arrangements, such as additional hours, fixed term contracts, temporary promotions and agency workers. However, without a long-term budget allocation, committing to permanent arrangements is problematic. Nevertheless, the HR Team is preparing proposals for consultation on how vacancies will be filled when the funding position is confirmed.

Action: Chief Executive/HR Managers

4. HR Matters

Progress against HR Work Plan for 2020-21

4.1 The HR Managers provided an update on current activities. The HR Work Plan for 2020-21 is on track to be delivered.

4.2 A key recent development is work to devise a Covid-19 vaccination policy. This will be adopted for use in the Agency and promoted externally.

Action: HR Managers

4.3 The HR Team has developed an on-boarding hub for virtual staff inductions. Feedback from a new staff member was that, "*she had never been made more welcome anywhere in her life*". Michelle McGinley suggested that this approach could be shared externally.

Action: HR Managers

Health and Wellbeing

4.4 The HR Managers provided an update on health and wellbeing activities.

4.5 An action plan to address issues identified following the 'Work Well, Live Well' survey conducted by Chest, Heart and Stroke has been prepared for review by the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee.

Action: HR Managers

4.6 Committee members commended the HR Team for their work in supporting staff and in developing the health and wellbeing programme.

4.7 The HR Managers expressed their appreciation to Gary McMichael for his work with the HR Team to develop a wellbeing strategy, which underpinned the 'Together' People Programme.

HR Metrics

4.8 The Committee noted the HR Metrics (paper FP 03-03/21 refers).

Update on the work of the Employment Relations Group (ERG)

4.9 The HR Managers provided an update on the work of the ERG and its sub-groups.

4.10 The Committee noted that the ERG has been in operation for almost 12 months. The ERG's terms of reference allow members to stand down after one year to give others an opportunity to participate. The HR Team will be seeking expressions of interest from other staff to join the group.

Action: HR Managers

5. ICT Matters

Progress against IS Plan for 2020-21

- 5.1 The IT Manager provided an update on current activities. The IS Plan for 2020-21 is on track to be delivered.
- 5.2 The Committee noted that the new mobile phone contract has been signed. Roll-out of phones to staff continues. This will provide greater levels of connectivity through the use of apps, such as the planned new Intranet app.
- 5.3 The IT Manager is looking at longer-term ICT support arrangements following relocation to James House. This includes the possibility of on-boarding to IT Assist if technical issues can be overcome.

Action: IT Manager

- 5.4 The annual audit of the Agency's accreditation against the ISO 27001 information security management standard took place in December 2020. No issues were identified. The audit report is due to be considered at the forthcoming Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting.

Update on CMRS Phases 3/4 Project

- 5.5 The IT Manager reported that arrangements to complete Phase 3 have been agreed, along with payment for outstanding work. The work is expected to be completed in March 2021.
- 5.6 This development work will be progressed in parallel with Phase 4 activities, which will enable representatives to use the web portal for submitting Early Conciliation notifications. This is expected to be operational from April 2021.
- 5.7 In the meantime, a secure file sharing service has been implemented to enable the online exchange of sensitive conciliation-related documents without the need to individually encrypt or password protect. This service is being extended to the Certification Office to facilitate the submission of annual returns from employer and employee representative bodies.

Action: IT Manager

6. Communications Matters

Progress against Communications Plan for 2020-21

- 6.1 The Communications Manager provided an update on current activities. The Communications Plan for 2020-21 is on track to be delivered.

- 6.2 A business case is being prepared for photography and animation work to provide explanatory videos to support the Conciliation Team.
Action: Communications Manager
- 6.3 The Committee noted that all public bodies are required to publish an accessibility statement on their websites and ensure that content meets a specific standard. An audit has confirmed that the Agency is in compliance, but more could be done to increase the accessibility of some older PDF documents.
Action: Communications Manager
- 6.4 The Communications Manager reported that the social media advertising campaign in Autumn 2020 had been very successful. Consideration is now being given to using Google Ads to drive more traffic to the website and counteract an organisation's misleading advertising. A business case for this will be developed.
Action: Communications Manager
- 6.5 The Agency has received good media coverage over the past few months, including take-up of the press-release on the recent Uber Supreme Court judgement and on a Channel 4 programme where our advice was sought to ensure that content was applicable to NI.
- 6.6 The Committee noted that an events management company is being procured to help organise the employment relations conference in early 2022.
Action: Communications Manager

7 Business Support Matters

Update on accommodation matters

- 7.1 The Chief Executive reported that a date, 8-11 April 2022, has been confirmed for relocation to James House.
- 7.2 The Chief Executive has received a draft occupation licence. The Agency will pay only a nominal rent, which should release substantial savings for the creation of new posts.
- 7.3 The ERG working group will be progressing the next phase of design work and colour schemes, when this is commissioned by the Department of Finance in a few weeks' time.

Update on Customer Service Excellence matters

- 7.4 The Business Support Manager reported that formal assessment against the Customer Service Excellence standard will take place on 16 and 18 March 2021.
- 7.5 A new web page highlighting customer service issues is being developed. The page will contain the Agency's Customer Charter, and relevant policies and procedures. The page will also feature a feedback section to allow customers to provide comments, compliments, complaints and suggestions.

Action: Business Support Manager

Update on Outcome Based Accountability measures

- 7.6 The Business Support Manager reported on development work underway to collect customers' email addresses before they access webinars. This will enable the Agency to obtain customer feedback on the effectiveness of the webinars.
- 7.7 An automated telephone survey of the Workplace Information Service is in place to facilitate evaluation of the service.

Update on Official Statistics

- 7.8 The Committee noted that Agency has been advised of a delay to the Official Statistics (Amendment) Order, which was due to become effective in April 2021. It is anticipated that the Order will now be in place in July 2021.

8 Any Other Business

- 8.1 The Chair thanked staff for their work, which is greatly appreciated by the Committee, and commented that the reports provided are substantial and informative.
- 8.2 On behalf of staff, the Chief Executive thanked Committee members and said it was a pleasure working with them. He thanked Gary McMichael for his invaluable input around mental health issues. The Chief Executive also thanked Albert Mills, as Chair, for his leadership of the Committee and his support and encouragement for staff. The Committee provides a valuable opportunity for colleagues to show-case the work they do and seek constructive feedback.

9 Date of Next Meeting

- 9.1 The next meeting will be on 1 June 2021.