

Minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on 1 June 2021 at 10.00am by videoconference

Present: Geraldine Alexander (Chair)
Michelle McGinley
Lee Wilson

In attendance: Don Leeson (Chief Executive)
Angela Bryans (HR Manager)
Paul Herink (IT Manager)
Claire Kilpatrick (HR Manager),
Paul Lowe (Director of Corporate Services)
Mary O'Brien (Business Support Manager)
Alison Wolfe (Minute Secretary)
Sarah Livingstone (Board Apprentice)

Apologies: Keelin Kelly (Communications Manager)

Declarations of Interest: no conflicts of interest were declared.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was noted that this was the first meeting for the Chair and Lee Wilson who were appointed to the Agency Board with effect from 1 May 2021. It was also the first meeting for the Boardroom Apprentice, Sarah Livingstone.

1. Minutes of recent Meeting

1.1 The minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on 2 March 2021 (paper FP01-06/21 refers) were agreed as an accurate record.

2. Matters Arising from the Last Meeting

2.1 The Director of Corporate Services reported that Claire Webb has volunteered to act as Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champion for staff (paragraph 2.1 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). Claire has had an initial meeting with the Board champion, Daire Murphy. The Committee agreed to invite Claire to their next meeting to discuss her role. The Chair asked that the Committee's appreciation is passed to Claire for volunteering for the role.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

2.2 The HR team continue to monitor developments in relation to the NICS' review of its special bonus scheme (paragraph 2.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

Action: HR Managers

2.3 Following completion of selection interviews the HR team are finalising pre-employment checks for the recent Communications Manager recruitment exercise (paragraph 2.4 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). The Chair asked that congratulations are passed to Keelin Kelly on her success at interview and thanked Michelle McGinley for her participation in the process.

2.4 A Covid-19 vaccination policy has been devised for internal use and external promotion (paragraph 4.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.5 The on-boarding hub for virtual staff inductions has been well received (paragraph 4.3 of the minutes of the previous meeting refers). HR are now considering promoting the hub as good practice.

Action: HR Managers

2.6 As a follow-up to the 'Work Well, Live Well' survey conducted by Chest, Heart and Stroke, the Agency engaged Healthy Place to Work to carry out focused interviews with staff to identify stressors (paragraph 4.5 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). The Senior Leadership Team are currently considering following focussed interviews with staff.

Action: Senior Leadership Team

2.7 The secure file sharing service is now operational and being used in a number of business areas across the Agency (paragraph 5.7 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.8 The business case for photography and animation work has been subsumed into a procurement exercise for a range of communications services (paragraph 6.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.9 The Communications Manager is exploring software to help address issues raised in respect of accessibility of documents on the Agency's website (paragraph 6.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.10 The Agency is now making use of Google Ads to better promote services and drive more traffic to the website (paragraph 6.4 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.11 The Committee noted that an events management company has been procured to provide support in organising the employment relations conference in early 2022 (paragraph 6.6 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). A stakeholder group from the Roundtable has been established to help curate the conference.

3. Finance Matters - Update

- 3.1 The DCS reported that the Agency has been allocated a baseline budget of £3,823k for this year plus approximately £1m of non-recurrent funding linked to economic recovery and NI protocol activities. The Senior Leadership Team are looking at how best to allocate the additional non-recurrent funding. It is anticipated that further financial savings will be made following the move to James House.
- 3.2 The annual audit of the Agency's accounts is ongoing. A preliminary report will be presented to the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee on 7 June. The Chief Executive reported that there were no issues identified and the report is with NIAO for approval. The Agency spent 99% of its budget, which was on target. RTTCWG will be submitted to the June ARAC and Board meetings for approval.
- 3.3 Management Accounts will be submitted to the June Board meeting.

Action: Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

4. HR Matters

Outline of HR Work Plan for 2021-22 and progress to date

- 4.1 The HR Managers provided an update on the four main themes within the Work Plan for 2021-22:
- ✚ Belong and Engage - *building a strong engagement culture to ensure staff feel valued and listened to and are informed in a timely manner.* A very good collaborative working partnership exists with TUS and will be maintained particularly in terms of policies.
 - ✚ Support – *ensuring support for staff in the work that we do to enable them to deliver the best service to customers.* An 'app' based communication (Intranet) is being developed.
 - ✚ Grow – *covers training and appraisals.* HR have received great feedback from staff participating in the Leadership Development programme which provides a development opportunity for all staff. 'Give SLT a go' provides a development opportunity for Managers.
 - ✚ To be the best we can – the Agency has achieved liP Gold and is working towards Platinum.
- 4.2 Policy work is continuing. Vaccine, and Disciplinary and Grievance policies will be discussed with TUS at JNCC on 10 June.

- 4.3 The Employment Relations Group have considered recognition and reward, with their input incorporated into a new policy. Given the constraints associated with reward packages the primary focus will be on staff recognition. This will be an important theme within the new people strategy.

Action: HR Managers

HR Metrics

- 4.4 The Committee noted the HR Metrics and the year-end information provided (paper FP 02-06/21 refers).
- 4.5 HR have been discussing concerns about potential presenteeism with line managers. The issue has also been raised at ERG. HR have communicated with staff through the 'Together' People Programme, 'it's okay not to be okay' but recognise that more work is needed around the disconnection piece.
- 4.6 A query was raised about whether it was possible to monitor how people were working. HR referred to their 'Ask HR, Tell HR' sessions with line managers. Flexi sheets are monitored and a reflective section has been added to appraisals. An important part of disconnecting is to walk away and take breaks. An action plan will be developed following a planned discussion with Healthy Place to Work. Michelle McGinley suggested that the right to disconnect guidance could be shared externally as an exemplar employer.
- 4.7 The Committee noted the positive picture in terms of the downward trend in sickness absence and the 100% attendance. However, they recognised the need to look at this in terms of presenteeism and making sure staff know they have the right to disconnect. The HR team were complimented for the support provided to staff.
- 4.8 The Chair thanked the HR Managers for their update which was noted as positive in terms of initiatives and statistics.

Action: HR Managers

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. The group is now in its second year and while the majority of members have remained on the group a number of new members have joined. The group is representative of staff across the Agency and provides great forum for dialogue, feedback and sharing ideas on various issues.

Action: HR Managers

5. ICT Matters

Outline of IS Plan for 2021-22 and progress to date

- 5.1 The IT Manager provided an update on current activities. The IT Plan and Strategy for the next four years are being finalised. The Plan is built on three core elements - infrastructure which continues to evolve; partnerships with those we work with to maintain service delivery, and both internal and external customer groups.
- 5.2 The case management environment underpins most of the work done within the Agency and will continue to develop to maintain levels of operational capability.
- 5.3 The Agency has completed the annual ISO 27001 process and it is important that the standard is maintained. It's also important to continually improve capabilities to produce quality data to develop HR and Finance systems, secure document sharing system and others.

Action: IT Manager

Update on CMRS Phases 3/4 Project

- 5.4 The IT Manager reported that we he will be undertaking initial testing this week and liaising with colleagues to arrange a structured process to sign off Phases 3 and 4 and get them into service.
- 5.5 The support arrangement relating to the Agency's core business system (CMRS) is due to expire and options for future provision are being considered.

Update on IS Managed Services

- 5.6 In anticipation of the move to James House the Agency has been considering options for the future provision of IS Managed Services. A business case is being developed.
- 5.7 In response to a query about cyber-attacks the IT Manager reported that the Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services and himself recently met with representatives from Translink to share information. The Agency has security arrangements in place and will continue to monitor existing protections. As part of ISO 27001 systems security arrangements are assessed every year.
- 5.8 An anti-virus update has recently been applied and staff access to personal web based emails will be blocked in future. Along with this, two-factor authentication will be applied as a further level of protection when staff are logging on to access the network. Other areas of protection will be examined.

Action: IT Manager

6. Communications Matters

Outline of Communications Plan for 2021-22 and progress to date

- 6.1 The Director of Corporate Services provided an update on current activities.
- 6.2 The Communications Manager is promoting the Menopause Guidance drawn up in conjunction with the Equality Commission and NIC-ICTU.
- 6.3 Launch of the Agency's Vaccine Policy has been held pending clearance from DfE. It is hoped to be able to launch the policy this week. The Director of Corporate Services commended the work done by Helen Smyth in preparing both the vaccine policy and menopause guidance. A joint webinar entitled 'Promoting Equality in Employment for Women Affected by Menopause' is scheduled for Thursday, 10 June.
- 6.4 The Agency is receiving positive feedback on its e-zine with increasing numbers of people wishing to sign up to receive the publication. The Committee noted that the e-zine is an excellent way to promote the services of the Agency and communicate with stakeholders.
- 6.5 Work is ongoing to engage a student placement to augment the communications function. The role will focus primarily on economic recovery and communications around advisory work.
- 6.6 Work has commenced on a Communications Strategy, building on success to date, internal communications and continuing to develop and grow social media presence and awareness of Agency services.
Action: Communications Manager
- 6.7 It was noted that the Director of Employment Relations Services took part in the Radio Ulster 'On Your Behalf' programme on 29 May to promote the work of the Agency.

7 Business Support Matters

Update on accommodation matters

- 7.1 The Chief Executive reported that an internal competition has commenced to appoint a temporary Project Manager to oversee a range of projects such as exiting the current Head Office and the move to James House. The Agency is seeking to commence this work as soon as possible.

- 7.2 A paper on 'Re-Opening the Agency's Offices' which was presented to the Board in August 2020 will be updated in light of current guidelines. The Chief Executive is in discussion with TUS around concerns about car parking at James House. Aligned to this is hybrid working and maintaining the wellbeing of staff.
- 7.3 The Agency's business continuity plan will also be updated, particularly from an IT and working communications perspective.
- 7.4 The Agency will consider potential use of regional hubs as part of future office accommodation plans.
- 7.5 The Agency secured funding to make provision in its accounts to allow for Head Office dilapidations. The committee will be kept apprised of issues raised in relation to the operating licence and queries around rent payments after 5 years in the new Head Office location.

Update on Customer Service Excellence matters

- 7.6 The Business Support Manager reported that the Agency achieved the Customer Service Excellence standard in March and is now working towards first re-assessment in March 2022. Work can begin to make some improvements at this stage with a renewed focus planned between January-March 2022.

Action: Business Support Manager

Update on Outcome Based Accountability measures

- 7.7 The Business Support Manager reported that this remains a work-in-progress. The Agency will however be in a better position to provide information for the 2021-22 annual report.

Update on Official Statistics

- 7.8 The legislation is scheduled to be in place in July 2021. In the meantime, work is ongoing to ensure that the statistical information provided is accurate. Statistics will be maintained on a regular basis going forward.

8 Any Other Business

- 8.1 No further business to report.
- 8.2 The Chair thanked everyone for their excellent work and their contributions. She looked forward to working with staff through this committee and the Board.

9 Date of Next Meeting

- 9.1 The next meeting will be on 7 September 2021 at 10.00am.