

Minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on 7 December 2021 at 10.00am by videoconference

Present: Geraldine Alexander (Chair)
Michelle McGinley
Lee Wilson (agenda item 6 on)

In attendance: Don Leeson (Chief Executive)
Angela Bryans (HR Manager)
Patricia Coulter (Knowledge Manager)
Aideen Duggan (Board Apprentice)
Paul Herink (IT Manager)
Keelin Kelly (Communications Manager)
Claire Kilpatrick (HR Manager)
Paul Lowe (Director of Corporate Services)
Mary O'Brien (Business Support Manager)
Claire Webb (agenda item 1 only)
Alison Wolfe (Minute Secretary)

Apologies: Diane Edgington (Accommodation Project Manager)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The Chair welcomed Claire Webb who was attending in her role as EDI Champion to provide an update on her role to date and to discuss the results of the recent staff survey on Diversity & Inclusion.

Declarations of Interest: no conflicts of interest were declared.

1. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)

- 1.1 Claire Webb provided a detailed presentation on her background and first steps in the role of EDI Champion, including details of the recent staff survey. She reported that there was an 80% engagement with positive responses to the Agency's commitment to EDI. She highlighted a number of areas that need to be addressed and proposals for consideration.
- 1.2 A number of objectives will be identified and the survey report will provide a useful benchmark for improvements to be achieved through the Agency's EDI programme.
- 1.3 It was agreed that the Board look at incorporating EDI into the Agency's vision and values.

- 1.4 Training needs identified by the survey will be addressed and additional support provided in terms of challenging discrimination, bullying and harassment.
- 1.5 It was noted that the report is comprehensive but important in forming the basis of the Agency's EDI journey. It will also be important for the Board to support the Agency in its EDI efforts.
- 1.6 The Chief Executive indicated that the EDI Champion has demonstrated a real passion and growing expertise for the role. She will be share the survey findings with the Employment Relations Group in advance of a wider organisational dialogue. EDI activities will be an important area within the Agency's new business plan.
- 1.7 The Chair thanked the EDI Champion for an excellent presentation and comprehensive report and wished her all the best for her future work in this important area. In return, the EDI Champion thanked the Committee for their feedback and support.

Claire Webb left the meeting.

2. Minutes of recent Meeting

- 2.1 The minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on 6 September 2021 (Paper FP01-12/21) were agreed as an accurate record.

3. Matters Arising from the Last Meeting

- 3.1 HR are planning to meet with Helen Smyth to consider options to progress the on-boarding hub (para 2.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
- 3.2 The Communications Manager has recirculated the use of branding and style guidelines to staff (para 5.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
- 3.3 A review of the Agency's business continuity plan will be addressed by the Accommodation Project Manager (para 6.11 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
- 3.4 The Board have now approved the four business strategies – Business Intelligence, Communications, IS, People (para 7.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

4. Finance Matters – Update

- 4.1 The Director of Corporate Services reported that updated Management Accounts were presented to the Board at their November meeting.
- 4.2 It is anticipated that the current underspend in employment costs will be addressed by planned expenditure.
- 4.3 Overall resource expenditure was reported as £245K below profile. The Agency is viring some of this resource to meet committed expenditure on learning and development, and ICT costs anticipated as part of the transition to a new IS managed services provider planned for the final quarter of the year.
- 4.4 A significant investment has been made in learning and development this year to support the establishment of the new economic development, accommodation and knowledge management functions.
- 4.5 Prompt payments to suppliers are all within targets.
- 4.6 The Director of Corporate Services reported that the Finance Officer has returned to work following a period of long-term sickness absence. The Chair requested that the Committee's best wishes to be passed on to the Finance Officer.

Action: Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

5. Knowledge Management

- 5.1 Patricia Coulter outlined the background to her role as Knowledge Manager. The post plays a key role in championing learning across the Agency and advocating a learning based approach for everyone.
- 5.2 There are three strands to the role – management of information; external work and internal work. Patricia outlined each of the strands, her work to date and the work she will focus on in future.
- 5.3 As part of her role, Patricia has introduced a weekly update to staff setting out employment news and key information. Staff are also proactive in providing information to be shared with others. There is a huge amount of work in engaging with the different sections within the Agency but staff are already reporting the positive benefits of the role.
- 5.4 The Chair recognised the role as being both interesting and challenging and highlighted what has already been achieved within a short space of time, principally as a result of Patricia's wealth of experience within the Agency.

- 5.5 Michelle McGinley highlighted the importance of keeping staff knowledge learning up to date particularly in an NI context, and that it was great to see the Agency recognise the need for such a role. Michelle suggested that the Agency consider developing our own podcasts. They provide a good way of collaborating with others.
- 5.6 The Chair thanked Patricia for her report and wished her all the very best with future work plans. The Committee looks forward to hearing further updates.

Lee Wilson joined the meeting.

6. HR Matters

- 6.1 The HR Managers commented on the value of the EDI Champion and Knowledge Manager roles, particularly in developing people initiatives and ideas.
- 6.2 The extent of resourcing activity and staff movement generally this year along with accompanying learning and & development needs has increased workload within HR.
- 6.3 The HR Work plan is on course; the only delay noted is the development of the Intranet app for staff which has been overtaken by other priorities.
- 6.4 The student placement working alongside the Communications Manager is proving beneficial. Unfortunately HR were unsuccessful in appointing a similar role and are therefore hoping to commence this exercise earlier for next year.
- 6.5 There has been a significant investment this year in learning and development and HR continue to work steadily through the training plan to ensure all staff are upskilled.
- 6.6 On the recruitment side, three AOs have recently been appointed and an exercise to appoint two permanent EOIs has just been completed.
- 6.7 In light of the age profile of staff, HR are progressing plans for a staff retirement hub for staff setting out information in respect of finance, wellbeing etc.
- 6.8 HR are considering ways to get the wider staff group involved in policy development. New policies currently being considered include a carers' policy, domestic violence, sexual harassment, menopause, mental health at work, and a probation procedure.

6.9 Revised Discipline, Grievance, Absence and a staff Vaccination policy were launched recently. HR are currently consulting internally with a view to adapting the Agency's Hybrid Working Guidance to fit the specific needs of the Agency.

Action: HR Managers

HR Metrics

6.10 The Committee noted the HR Metrics (paper FP02-12/21).

6.11 Committee members noted the positive level of attendance (71%); however also noted that absence is starting to increase.

6.12 The HR Managers reported a healthy level of internal training activities.

6.13 With just over 50% of staff aged over 50 the HR Managers highlighted the need to ensure that the Agency is able to retain intelligence and knowledge.

HR Matters

6.14 HR are currently canvassing staff views in relation to a Health and Wellbeing calendar for 2022, and a new charity partner for 2022. Arising out of the EDI survey, staff views will also be sought in relation to mental health issues.

6.15 HR Managers reported that 70% of mid-year appraisal reviews were returned on target. Some reviews have been delayed to staff absence.

6.16 Line managers have been reminded to encourage staff to use annual leave as we approach the end of the leave year. As a result of Covid staff were permitted to carry over additional leave last year. The Chief Executive reported no concerns in respect of financial implications of staff carrying over annual leave.

6.17 The Chair thanked the HR Managers for their update.

Patricia Coulter left the meeting.

7. ICT Matters

7.1 The IT Manager reported that the Agency had been awarded ISO 27001 reaccreditation.

7.2 The IT Manager continues to work with the BST Manager in producing statistics for publication in line with the Agency's obligations under the Official Statistics Provider status. As part of this the Agency is currently exploring options to present information in a geo mapping format.

- 7.3 The IT Manager outlined the ongoing difficulties being experienced with the CMRS support service provider. The Agency is now targeting a move to a new service provider at the end of January 2022. A new provider has been identified as being dynamic specialists with experience of working with public sector clients and an existing knowledge base of the Agency's original CMRS programme.
- 7.4 A number of revised options are now being considered within the Business Case for delivery of future IS Managed Services which will allow for greater control over the transition of the CMRS into the IT Assist environment.
- 7.5 The Chair thanked Paul for his update and acknowledged the assurance provided in terms of CMRS support moving to a new provider with an existing knowledge base of the system.

8. Communications Matters

- 8.1 The Communications Manager reported that the Agency's media partners are progressing graphic design work along with development of a podcast and written pieces for media and social media to enhance the Agency's output.
- 8.2 A number of potential dates have been identified in January 2022 to facilitate a stakeholder mapping exercise; Board members will be contacted regarding availability.
- 8.3 The communications placement student has proved a very useful addition to the team and has already brought an enthusiastic and helpful approach to the work of updating the Agency's website and planning social media posts. He has designed an Agency Christmas card and is also working with the HR team in creating a wellbeing pack.
- 8.4 The International Agencies Conference was held in virtual format on 2 December 2021. Delegates shared their experiences of Covid and other contemporary employment relations matters.
- 8.5 The Agency's employment relations conference is scheduled to take place on 24 February 2022, hopefully in person in Titanic Belfast. Invitations will be issued for people to attend in person with a secondary option to attend virtually. The Chief Executive is putting a final conference programme together in conjunction with the Roundtable working group.
- 8.6 Twitter accounts have been set up for the Chief Executive and EDI Champion with a view to sharing commentary, articles, and thought pieces on employment relations with the objective of raising the profile of the Agency.

- 8.7 The Communications Manager reported that she is currently developing an internal communications framework to ensure we are making best use of internal channels.
- 8.8 The Chair thanked the Communications Manager for her update and for the important work being undertaken in a number of areas.

9. Business Support Matters

- 9.1 The Business Support Manager provided an update on Customer Service Excellence (CSE). Having achieved the standard in March the Agency will be reassessed in March 2022 as part of a rolling three year programme.
- 9.2 In relation to Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) the Business Support Manager has been populating gaps in the available data and developing mechanisms for evaluation of remaining services. Line Managers have been engaged in these exercises.
- 9.3 Official Statistics – The Business Support and IT Managers recently attended a NISRA seminar which they found useful in detailing relevant procedures to be followed. The Chief Executive and Communications Manager will attend a further event planned for early 2022.
- 9.4 The Chair thanked the Business Support Manager and recognised the amount of work ahead in preparing for CSE and OBA.

10. Accommodation Matters

- 10.1 The Chief Executive reported that Head Office premises were opened up on 1 November to an increased number of staff. However, in light of the most recent public health advice staff are still being encouraged to work from home. The premises remain closed to the public with the exception of some independent appeals, mediations and occasional collective conciliations.
- 10.2 In respect of the Regional Office, it is anticipated that the Agency will remain in the premises until 2024 and will not take advantage of the break clause in the lease. This will allow IT arrangements to continue as they are while the Head Office relocates to James House. The Connect2 regional hub in the Derry/Londonderry area will not be available until 2023. The Agency continues to engage with NICS in terms of the regional hubs.
- 10.3 The Director of Corporate Services provided an update on the remaining work of the Accommodation Project and the plans for relocation James House.

10.4 An initial meeting of the Agency's Project Board took place at the end of November; the project PID has been developed and an initial meeting of the project team has also taken place. The James House Project - Transition Working Group (JHP-TWG) meets monthly and Agency staff are fully engaged as part of that group.

10.5 The Agency remains on track to move to James House in April 2022; however in our last discussion with the JHP-TWG supply issues with air handling units for the building were highlighted as potentially giving rise to delays. This however is yet to be confirmed. The Agency has been considering possible contingencies in light of that.

10.6 Efforts to move to a paperless environment in advance of the relocation are progressing.

10.7 The Chair thanked the Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services for their update.

11. Any Other Business

11.1 The Chief Executive reported that Alison Wolfe will be retiring from the Agency in April. A process is underway to find a replacement.

11.2 The Chief Executive reported on the Business Plan commitment to put proposals to Board in March around restructuring. An SLT/SMT workshop took place on 16 November 2021 to progress discussions with a further workshop planned for 15 December 2021. A member of staff has been appointed to a temporary ERM role to identify service process changes to underpin new structures.

11.3 The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the meeting and noted that there is a huge amount of work taking place, particularly against the backdrop of a move to James House.

11.4 The Chair wished everyone a very happy Christmas and urged them to stay safe and well over the break.

12. Dates of Next Meetings

12.1 It was agreed to move the meeting scheduled for 1 March to 1 February. Dates for committee meetings during 2022-23 have already been circulated to members.

12.2 The next meeting will be on **1 February 2022 at 10.00am.**