

**Finance and Personnel Committee meeting to be held on
Tuesday, 2 May 2023 at 10.00am
in the Quigley Room, 4th Floor, James House.**

Present: Geraldine Alexander (Chair)
Lee Wilson
John Taylor

In attendance: Don Leeson (Chief Executive)
Paul Lowe (Director of Corporate Services) (DCS)
Angela Bryans (HR Manager)
Claire Kilpatrick (HR Manager)
Patricia Coulter (Knowledge Manager)
Diane Edgington (Accommodation Project Manager)
Claire Webb (EDI Manager)
Christine Magill (Boardroom Apprentice)
Paddy Ann Moore (Business Support Manager)
Julie Ann Donnelly (Communications Manager)
Oliver Murray (Executive Assistant)

Apologies: Paul Herink (IT Manager)

1. Welcome – Introductions, Apologies and Declarations of Conflicts of Interests

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that pending confirmation of Board appointments or potential extensions the Committee would be reduced to three members at present. The Chair particularly welcomed **Julie Ann Donnelly** to her first meeting of this Committee.

Declarations of Interest: no conflicts of interest were declared.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

2.1 It was noted that the minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on 7 February 2023 (Paper FP01-05/23) required amendments to the list of attendees to include Michelle McGinley and remove a double entry in respect of Lee Wilson. With these amendments noted, the minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 The Director of Corporate Services advised that there were no matters arising from the previous meeting that would not be picked up through the agenda.

4. Finance Matters - Update

4.1 The Director of Corporate Services gave an update on finance matters.

4.2 Following the recent announcement of the NI budget settlement, the Agency is still awaiting confirmation of its budget allocation for 2023-24. Even if the Agency receives the same allocation as 2022-23 it will still be required to absorb significant inflationary pressures.

4.3 Jayne Brady, Head of the NICS will be briefing the NI Engagement Forum this afternoon (2 May 2023) regarding the NI budget settlement.

4.4 In light of the budget uncertainty the Agency continues to sustain a number of temporary staffing arrangements in its structures. These will be reviewed in light of eventual confirmation of budget.

4.5 The Agency is currently finalising the Annual Report and Accounts and preparing for the NIAO audit, with the consolidated accounts having been submitted to DfE on Friday 28 April 2023. The Director of Corporate Services recorded his gratitude to the Finance Officer, Paul Cassidy and the team at Baker Tilly Moore for progressing the work on the accounts.

4.6 The DCS detailed the outturn for 2022-23 as based on the draft accounts. It was noted that the final outturn would be confirmed upon completion of the audit of the accounts.

4.7 The Chair thanked the Director of Corporate Services for his update.

5. HR Matters

5.1 The HR Manager presented the Draft HR Work Plan for 2023-24 (FP 02-05/23), which highlighted a range of issues, including: Succession Planning, Health and Wellbeing, EDI, Hybrid Working, Apprenticeships and Re-procurement of supporting HR information system.

5.2 The HR Managers presented the HR Metrics (for 2022-23) report (FP 03-05/23), and highlighted the following:

- Absence rates were higher than expected for the year high with a total of 1159 days lost, equivalent to a 7.88% absence rate. A lot of this is attributable to a number of long-term absences
- HR will reinforce the requirements of the agreed Absence Management Policy in 2023-24
- The Agency continued to make a significant investment in staff learning and development throughout 2022-23

5.3 The Committee noted the Draft HR Work Plan for 2023-24 and the HR Metrics at year-end 2022-23. The Chair thanked the HR Managers for their update.

6. ICT Matters

6.1 In the absence of the IT Manager, the Director of Corporate Services presented the Draft IS Work Plan for 2023-24 (FP 04-05/23), and provided an update on IS issues.

6.2 This represents the 3rd year work plan under the IS Strategy and reflects the core elements as set out in the Strategy of ICT Partnerships, Infrastructure and Customers, along with a sub-set of eight related strategic components.

6.3 Key objectives this year will include:

- Transition to IT Assist
- Review of CMRS
- Move to cloud-based Microsoft Office 365
- Continuing to enable hybrid and agile working arrangements
- Growing the Agency's data analytic capabilities

6.4 The DCS advised that given the significant challenges experienced in attempting to recruit a second IS Manager throughout 2022-23 the Agency has abandoned plans to directly recruit to this position as the salary on offer is no longer competitive. The SLT is looking at alternative mechanisms to progress some IS exercises in 2023-24.

6.5 The Committee noted the Draft IS Work Plan for 2023-24. The Chair thanked the Director of Corporate Services and the IT Manager for the work to date in developing and delivering the IS Work Plan.

7. Communication Matters

- 7.1 The Communications Manager presented the Draft Communications Work Plan for 2023-24 (FP 05-05/23) and noted a range of Communication matters.
- 7.2 It was noted that the thought leadership pieces published in the Irish News as authored by members of the Senior Leadership Team have so far been positively received.
- 7.3 An update was provided on social media engagement statistics and plans for future outreach campaigns.
- 7.4 In response to a query from **John Taylor** the Communications Manager briefed the Committee on mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of communications activities.
- 7.5 The Committee noted the Draft Communications Work Plan for 2023-24. The Chair thanked the Communications Manager for her work in developing the Communications Work Plan and for her update.

8. Business Support Matters

- 8.1 The Business Support Manager presented the Draft Business Intelligence Work Plan for 2023-24 (FP 06-05/23) and gave an update on Business Support matters.
- 8.2 The Customer Service Excellence (CSE) reassessment exercise was completed on 28 March with the Agency successfully retaining the standard and demonstrating improved compliance.
- 8.3 Plans for Data protection training for all staff in the near future were highlighted.
- 8.4 The Committee noted the Draft Business Intelligence Work Plan for 2023-24. The Chair thanked the Business Support Manager for her work in developing the Business Intelligence Work Plan and for her work in co-ordinating the CSE assessment exercise. The Committee congratulated the Agency on its successful retention of the CSE standard.

9. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

- 9.1 The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Manager presented the Draft EDI Work Plan for 2023-24 (FP 07-05/23) and noted a range of EDI matters.

- 9.2 The Agency's retention of the Bronze Award from Diversity Mark was noted, along with positive feedback received from judges.
- 9.3 An update the newly launched Diversity Council was given. This will act as a cross-cutting forum for discussion of issues across the diverse range of staff networks.
- 9.4 Plans for integrating EDI into futures appraisals and training were noted.
- 9.5 The Committee noted the Draft EDI Work Plan for 2023-24. The Chair thanked the EDI Manager for her work in developing the EDI Work Plan and for her update.

10. Knowledge Management

- 10.1 The Knowledge Manager gave an update in relation to ongoing activities.
- 10.2 With a reduction in hours of 50% the Knowledge Manager advised that, in conjunction with the Director of Corporate Services, she was seeking to prioritise those aspects of the function which provide greatest benefit to the Agency and its staff.
- 10.3 In response to a query from **Lee Wilson** regarding opportunities for greater integration of Board members within some of the activities, it was agreed that staff knowledge updates would be shared with Board members.
- 10.4 The Chair thanked the Knowledge Manager for her update.

11. Accommodation Project

- 11.1 The Accommodation Project Manager provided an update on Accommodation matters.
- 11.2 Remaining 'snagging' issues are continuing to be raised through the James House Tenants Forum. These include issues with heating and the accompanying of visitors.
- 11.3 Manifestations have now been installed on internal glazing for the Agency's meeting rooms. These provide a degree of privacy without restricting the flow of light.
- 11.4 Negotiations on dilapidations for the Agency's previous location in Gordon Street are still to be concluded with the landlord.

11.5 It was noted that alternative plans for Regional Office accommodation are being considered at present.

11.6 With successful completion of the main project objectives the project is now preparing for closure. Business as usual activities in relation to premises management will be handed-over to the Business Support Team.

11.7 The Chair thanked the Accommodation Project Manager for her update.

12. Any Other Business

12.1 The Chief Executive briefed the Committee on the Agency's 're-imagining' transformation plans which will be advanced within this year's Business Plan. This will potentially include a renaming/rebranding exercise.

12.2 No further additional business was noted. The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the meeting.

13. Date of Next Meeting

13.1 The next meeting will be on **1 August 2023 at 10.00 am.**

Action: Executive Assistant