**Minutes of the 15th Meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on Wednesday 12 February 2020, at GTCNI, Albany House, Great Victoria Street, Belfast**

**Present:** Shaunagh Lambe, Emma Loughridge, Catherine McBride, Sonia McGowan, Brendan Morgan, Keith Smith

**Apologies:** Paul Boyle, Graham Gault, Siobhan McElhinney

**In Attendance:** Sam Gallaher (CEO), Gerry Devlin (SEO) (GD), Majella Matthews, (F&CM), Sima Gondhia (Temporary Finance Accountant) (SG), Lesley Dickson (LD) PA

Preamble

The CEO thanked members for attending and advised that the F&GP and ARAC Committees have the heaviest workload.

BM asked members to introduce themselves and the CEO advised that if any members wished to avail themselves of any training to let LD know.

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| 1. **Welcome, Introduction and Apologies**

Apologies were noted. 1. **Declarations of Interest**

The SEO informed members that at the PRRC meeting it was considered to amend the Declaration of Interest forms. The model to be used was the NIAO definition. He read out the definition and guidance to members and advised that as the agenda progressed members could declare interests if needed.**3. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair F&GP/20/15/01**It was proposed that Keith Smith be elected as Chair of F&GP.Proposed: S McGowanSeconded: C McBrideIt was proposed that Shaunagh Lambe be elected as Vice-Chair of F&GP.Proposed: K SmithSeconded: C McBride**4. Minutes and Terms of Reference**The CEO advised that the Terms of Reference are set by Council and asked if the Committee was content with these or did they propose any changes.BM advised that these ToRs were similar to the previous ones.The Chair asked about the circulation of Minutes prior to the meeting. The CEO advised that these are sent out one week prior to the meeting but that a draft could go to the Chair in the first instance. He said that the Minutes of each Committee go to the next Council meeting as a draft and are ratified at the next meeting of the Committee.The CEO advised that the Scheme of Publication encourages transparency and therefore our Minutes are published on the website. He said there was a need to ask if the Committee minutes should be published also and advised that what is discussed at meetings can end up in the public domain.BM advised that the minutes of the previous F&GP committee were just for information.The Chair proposed that “one week” in the Terms of Reference be changed to a minimum of 7 days.BM indicated that because there is a long space between meetings that the minutes should go to the Chair and are then circulated to members. The minutes can only be changed at the next F&GP meeting but members can note any changes to be made.The CEO said these matters would be picked up in a paper going to Council. Sometimes there is a lot said at the meetings and there is pressure for LD to get things right. The minutes should go to the Chair to tidy up first.The SEO said this can be agreed at Council but not today.Members were content with this.The CEO asked if members were content with the ToRs.Members were content.**5. Matters Arising**None**6. 2018-19 Draft Audited Annual Report & Accounts F&GP/20/15/02**The CEO advised that it was his intent to table the draft Annual Report and Accounts. This has been prepared and audited and there was no significant points raised by the auditors. There are reports to be added from the Chair and the CEO and in preparation there was not sufficient time after discussion with NIAO and DE. The report will come through the next cycle of meetings and is to be laid at end June/July.CMcB enquired about the registration system/database and the CEO advised that it was at the end of its useful life. A business case had been approved in 2015 but nothing had been progressed. There is a need to move on and re-do a business case. The software used is being withdrawn and the Council is having to spend money to plug a repair which would last 2/3 years. He advised members that we are now into our 5th DAC and this is the last chance to move forward. He said he was waiting on business case approval and costs for the repair in the current year are £100,000. Contract with the current supplier is up in March.BM highlighted that Windows 7 is now defunct and this system is based on Windows 7 so the function will not be supported.**7. Corporate Plan 2019-22 & 2019-20 Business Plan** **F&GP/20/15/03 & F&GP/20/15/04**The CEO spoke firstly about the Business Plan advising that this plan showed progression for the current year. He advised members of the high level of staff absence this year and that cost of which was £84,500. A large amount has been spent on HR and certain workstreams have been unable to be taken forward.The CEO then highlighted the work of Learning Leaders for the information of members.The CEO advised members that the Corporate Plan needs to be adopted. The Council is an NDPB and sponsored by the Department. Our funding is from teachers alone and the Department tell us how to spend this money as the fee is deemed public money. The Council reports to DE on a monthly/quarterly basis and meet with them on an Accountability Review.The CEO advised that over the period Oct 18 - June 19 he had worked with the Council on the development of the Corporate Plan. At his appointment it was noted by both the internal and external auditors that there was no corporate plan in place. He advised that the level of engagement by members of the previous Council in the development of the plan was less than expected.He highlighted the statutory functions of the Council and said that this plan sets out what the Council’s aspirations and goals for 2021-2023 would be. This plan was circulated to Council Members in July and that it is for Council to adopt or change and start again. The plan was given to Committee for context.Members were directed to Page 7 and the objectives of the plan were highlighted by the CEO. He then discussed income and expenditure and how this was affected by non-regulation as regulation would bring its own costs. He said there was a need to fulfil the statutory duties and then run down reserves in a measured way. He advised that there needs to be discussion with the Department on restricted reserves and is estimating what the workload would be.CMcB asked how this worked in the General Medical Council.The CEO advised that it was funded through doctors and that they also run educational programmes. He also explained the workings of the EWC and GTCS and said that if we run the reserves down it may suffice the term of this Council but the next Council will have bigger problems.The SEO informed members that the GTCNI was ready to regulate in 2005/06 but our primary powers had a deficit in terms of the Education Order which established the Council. He then provided members of the legal and legislative background problems with the regulatory powers.BM asked AB if the Department had set up a working group to discuss regulation.AB advised that conversations were ongoing with DSO but there had been no way to amend the legislation as there had been no Assembly in place and they are now actively looking to amend the legislation. They are trying to fix these properly and there are sets of articles needed. He advised that they were minded to make the changes quickly to get this matter settled. Officers and members discussed the problems with Primary and Secondary legislation.BM enquired if the Minister had been made aware of this and AB said that he had been given some details but would be updated in time.The CEO advised that he had met with the Minister and that he was aware there were issues.BM enquired if the Department had officially informed the Minister and AB said the Minister had been alerted that there were significant issues around regulation. He added that DSO also need to do an audit on existing regulations.Officers and members discussed how ongoing cases are being dealt with. The CEO advising that the Council is receiving referrals but it cannot act until the employer process is finished. He indicated that there were 61 cases on the books and these need to be addressed.The SEO added that the Department has no powers because they repealed their powers and have lost the power to remove teachers eligibility to teach.The CEO said that details were reflected in this plan which he would like to get adopted at the next meeting. He asked for members to send in their emails and comments.The Chair asked why there was a lack of engagement by the previous Council.The CEO said that there were 30 people running the organisation so there was a different consensus across the Council. The matter had been discussed at the meeting in June and he had asked for comments.BM enquired if there had been feedback from the other Committees.The CEO said he had had replies from 4 people and that a strategic direction needs to be set.SL enquired if the comments from the 4 people had been included in this plan. The CEO said that they had.SM enquired if there could be a proposal for a pot of money to support and back us.The CEO said that we could probably fund over the next 3 year period and could look for sponsorship or work with other organisations.The SEO highlighted that we are a very small organisation with a small number of staff.The CEO indicated that in our legislation we have powers to charge for what we do and that this plan buys time.Members discussed Learning Leaders which the Council is funding, the possibility of working with other organisations and how the other GTC budgets work. The Chair expressed concerns regarding the Business Plan noting that only about 50% (13) actions were either ‘not achieved/not likely to be achieved’.The CEO said this had been a very difficult year with staff absence levels at 20% and the Council had to spend money in areas where they did not envisage spending money.The Chair asked what is happening with staff absences.The CEO said these are causing concern and that there is an HR Action Plan which we are working our way through. We are trying to realign the organisation and reduce costs where relevant particularly to accommodate regulation. He advised that the staff restructure has been on the Business Plan for a few years including recruitment and making changes round the edges. He advised that he was looking at all areas of expenditure.CMcB enquired if staff were unhappy that they may lose their jobs.The CEO explained the VES programme and said that applications were going to go through as the Council needed a more settled structure.BM said there was an urgency to get regulation going as there are safeguarding issues and the Minister needs to be fully briefed.**8. Finance Update F&GP/20/15/05** SGh presented the paper to the Committee indicating the figures were to January 2020 and showed the allocation of funds. She advised members that we will meet the cost expenditure with a slight increase in income.The CEO advised that expenditure is being monitored.SGh indicated that if we had been regulating there would be an overspend. There is a slight delay to the Audit Programme but these would be picked up. She highlighted capital projects and spreading of income between banking institutions for best interest.SGh took members through the tables and highlighted expenditure.BM enquired about the cost of the HR budget.The CEO said that it had been estimated at £30,000 on top of an allocated £27,000. This does not include legal costs and occupational health reports. So the figure will be about £80,000.BM enquired if there is a projection that this will come down.The CEO said the Council had a contract and would hope the costs should be significantly less over the next year. There had been a high HR spend on dealing with personnel matters and grievances and Industrial Tribunals were working through. He said that these are HR related and we will use the expenditure for these.BM said that this cost needs to be brought down and the CEO questioned the need for a full time HR person in such a small organisation.SG enquired on the length of the HR contract.SGh said that it was until 2021 with an option to extend by one year.**9. Staffing and VES Update Presentation**The CEO advised that the Department was running a VES and expressions of interest had been received from a number of staff. This could facilitate alignment of structure and give staff the opportunity to leave with enhanced redundancy. The matter had been put to Council and it was agreed to seek expressions of interest. Four people had expressed an interest – 1 Comms Officer, 2 Registration Officers and one Admin Officer. He indicated that the salary saving net of adjustments would be approx. £66,000. The applications are in process and are working through. He added that this equated to 2.2 posts.The Chair enquired who would pick up the Communications work.The CEO said that there had been 2 posts and we would replace one of these. He updated members on the new website.BM enquired re the timeframe for VES and the CEO advised that it was the end of March.**Website**The Chair asked if anyone had visited the website.The CEO said that there was not a big change in content but would be glad of feedback.BM enquired if the identities of Council Members were on it.SL said that they were.The Chair expressed disappointment regarding the Website going live without the ‘privacy policy’ being linked. The CEO said he hoped the website would be fully functional by Autumn and indicated that website usage was very low. He discussed communications with teachers and said that there is a need for a person with the right skills and that a strategy is needed for communication.**10. Capital Projects Update F&GP/20/15/06****Registration Project**The CEO updated members regarding the Registration Repair Project, advising that the business case has been approved and that we have an IT Assist person on site at present. He advised that he hoped work on this would be completed by May.The CEO advised that there was a need to revise the business case to source the project manager. The problem for this project was fitting it in around other work. We could need outside assistance with the business case. The weakness in the current case is the benefits realisation. He said he would be meeting with CPD tomorrow regarding a Project Manager as we need to have a system procured by December.He highlighted the market testing exercise and BM enquired how long this would take. The CEO said it would be approximately one month. BM asked if it would extend procurement and the CEO said it should not as it would run before procurement.The CEO said that once approval comes we need to be ready for the tender documents to go. The key message for Council is there is not a lot of time. This is out 5th DAC and we need to get on with this.BM enquired if this is a 3 month exercise and the CEO advised it could take 6 months and there is a need to get started by April 2021. Between April 2021 and February 2022 we need to have a system installed.AB said that from a DE perspective lengthy delays were not a deliberate choice. There is a need to assess the business case to protect public money and this takes time. The advantage of going through someone like BCS is that they have done this before and know details.**New Registration System**The CEO said he was looking at around ½ million investment or 750,000.The Chair asked for sight of the business case.The CEO highlighted the course of the business case and advised that it had been withdrawn and that it was being re-vamped. Unforeseen circumstances had held it up and we are trying to get outside people to do it. He asked if DE would have the staff to do this as the best option is BCS but they could not start until April. He said he was unsure if we would get the time to do it.BM asked if the business case for the interim solution was sorted.AB said the business case was approved and signed off and was just waiting for the Permanent Secretary.**11. Office Accommodation Presentation**The CEO gave a presentation on accommodation. Not as a recommendation just as an option. He indicated that the lease on Albany House expires at the end of March with an option to extend. The cost would be £207,000 including IT costs. He highlighted the dilapidation and removal costs and said that we are under the scope of DoD as part of the government estate. We would need their approval for any move. He informed members of the option to move to James House but said that it would have involved an AGILE working environment and there were reservations regarding the staff being involved in this.The other option was on Stranmillis College Campus. This is still being treated as confidential.The Chair enquired how this option had arisen.The CEO said it had happened in conversation with Dr Heaslett. He said he wanted to bring it to the Committee to see if they wanted to go to Council with it. It would save £82,000 per year and was self contained with catering and room for Council/Committee meetings. He said that Stranmillis were supportive of the move. However our lease on Albany House would need to be extended for another year and a business case completed. Staff consultation would need to be done and he advised that there were 3 designated car parks with the lease but that there was also parking available on site.The Chair suggested BM go along to visit it.The CEO said he wanted to bring it to Council in March and then if it is ok to have a meeting between the Chair and Prof Heaslett. He asked if Committee were content for this to go to Council.He said he would be happy to bring the Chair up to see it.BM said that if Council think the staff would be happy then Council will likely support it.SM said it was important to let staff know. But the CEO said he would be more comfortable once the lease is signed.SM advised that it would give staff a year to plan and they should be involved in planning the offices.The CEO said he would set up an internal group.SM suggested a token financial award to help with staff. The CEO said that Council could pursue this or ask for other options or leave it to RPM. He added that both himself and the Chair could set up the presentation to staff.The committee gave positive feedback.**12. Business Planning & Budget 2020/21 Verbal Update**The CEO informed members that we are starting a cycle of internal planning around our own budget and would need to get the management team working on and looking at this. He said this will work through the next round of meetings and we would be budgeting to live within our income.The Chair asked if the Business Plan would go to the Council meeting and the CEO said it would be ready for the June meeting. He advised that it should not differ very much from the Business Plan which was presented today and there would be a draft plan for the March Council.**13. Any Other Business**BM enquired about recruitment for the Learning Leaders Advisory Group and the CEO advised which groups would need populated. He added that the GTC had been commissioned to so this work from Learning Leaders and some of our ex-Council members would need to be replaced.SM enquired of the level of commitment and the CEO advised that they met about once a quarter. BM said that the SEO had informed him that there was probably only going to be one further meeting. SM indicated her interest and LD is to pass this on to the SEO.The CEO reminded members about completing their annual Declaration of Interest form.**14. Date of Next meeting**The date of the next meeting will be Monday 4 May 2020. Signed………………………….. Dated ……………………………. | ActionActionActionsActionActionMembersActionActionCEOActionActionCEOActionLD |
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