**MINUTES OF THE F&GP COMMITTEE**

**HELD ON 28 SEPTEMBER 2021**

**AT 10.30AM BY ZOOM**

Present: K Smith (Chair), S Lambe (SL), S Magowan (SM), B Morgan (BM), S McElhinney (SMcE), D Boggs (DB), J Hunt (JH), R Beggs (RB)

In attendance: S Gallaher (CEO), L Dickson (PA)

Apologies: E Loughridge (EL), G Devlin (GD), A Chambers (DE)

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and apologies were noted. New members provided the Committee with a short introduction.

2. Declaration of Interest

None

3. Minutes of the meeting of 30 April and

4. Matters Arising

The CEO discussed the current situation of staff working from home and said that other government offices were still working from home and there was a number of things to be done prior to staff returning to the office. The Chair enquired if a risk assessment had been carried out and the CEO said this was part of the process.

SL enquired if it would be possible for members to be reimbursed for the cost of their printing and the CEO asked for receipts and said it has not been possible to get hard copies printed and asked if F&GP wanted to look at this they could.

Proposed: SL

Seconded: BM

The CEO is to follow up.

Page 1 - BM enquired if the Business Case for the HR provider had gone through. The CEO said the contract had been extended to April 2022 and we needed to get the business case in and liaise with CPD. BM stressed that this was imperative and the CEO said it would need to be done within the next six weeks and discussed options to extend the contract and said the business case done previously would need updated/reviewed and submitted as a work request into CPD. BM said he would like it noted that we were not able, as an organization to tender. SL asked the CEO if this the submission would take place within the next 6 weeks. The Chair requested to see the project evaluation and the CEO is to circulate this.

The Chair enquired if there had been any response to the NIPSA letter and the CEO indicated there had been no engagement from NIPSA other than the letter circulated at the end of June to Council Members. The CEO said he had contacted NIPSA regarding dates for a meeting but received no response and that Headstogether had not received a response to contact either. The CEO provided members with dates on which he had contacted NIPSA and said that Phase 2 of the HR Policy was received in August but there had been no recognition agreement. The Chair enquired about the correspondence from NIPSA and the CEO said that the letter to the Education Committee had been circulated to members with a view to discussion. The Chair asked if this could be put on the Agenda for the next Council meeting.

Financial Report Page 2, Para 2. SL enquired if invoicing had been done and the CEO said this would be covered on the Agenda.

Page 4 Point 11. SL enquired if the review of members had been completed and asked if the relevant members had been contacted regarding their return to Committee. The CEO said this had been covered.

Page 4 Motion presented. The Chair asked if the answers had been provided by A Boyd. The CEO to follow up for the Council meeting.

BM enquired about the Registrations Systems Project Board and said that Committee were told that the next 4 months would be crucial and asked if this would be on the agenda. The Chair asked that his disappointment be noted that the motion had not been dealt with. The CEO said he did not recall a response from the Department but would follow up.

The Chair enquired about accommodation and the CEO advised this was an issue to be picked up in the Autumn to follow up with the Estates Services Branch of DoF. He said that hybrid working and accommodation needs would be taken into consideration. He outlined that the lease was open to being extended and the organization may only require one floor, although if this was the case the Board Room could be lost. He added that he would contact Gareth Kimpson for his views. He outlined the possibility of James House and agile working, but the simplest thing to do would be to extend the current lease. He advised of the rebate the Council would receive because of Covid and the good notice period of 60 days. The Chair asked for accommodation to be added to the agenda for the next meeting. The CEO said we would be having discussions with DoF and the landlord.

SL enquired about training dates. The CEO advised that the dates provided were full and they have now provided dates for the autumn and he would circulate these to members.

SL enquired if the report has been finalized on the databreach. BM said that it had not been finalized and they were awaiting comments from the Registrar and then there would be a follow up meeting. CEO to address asap.

Proposed: BM

Seconded: SL

5. Financial and F&GP Update Report

The Chair asked who produced the report and the CEO advised that he had and worked on it with Zara Dunseath. The Chair enquired about ZD’s role and the CEO said she was the Financial and Corporate Services Admin Officer.

The CEO took members through the financial position at 31 August and indicated that finances were pretty much in line but may come in under budget. The Chair asked for the forecast for pay at the end of the year and the CEO said he thought this would be under budget. The CEO to report back on interest when he looks at accounts. BM enquired who was responsible for monitoring as there is no F&CM and ZD is leaving. The CEO said he was looking to replace these posts and is expecting to have a replacement for ZD before she leaves and CVs are being looked at for the F&CM. The CEO advised that he monitored bank accounts. BN enquired how duties are segregated. The CEO indicated that there were 2 people able to authorize payments at present. A temporary arrangement may need to be put in place but the Committee would have to authorize. BM indicated the need to have this up and running within two weeks. The CEO said that Headstogether were working on this and that he was having a meeting with DE this week re contingency and that the agency’s job is to provide people quickly. The two critical things are Zara’s post and the processing of payments. BM added that the F&CM was a trained accountant and asked how the accounts were being validated. The CEO said he was validating bank reconciliations and highlighted the need to get an accountant in. BM added his concern as to how we are standing over accounts. The CEO said he had been looking over the bank accounts and was confident with these and that steps are being taken to replace the F&CM and 2 Registration Officers. The Chair enquired if the CEO had an accountancy qualification and the CEO said he had a business qualification but if here were concerns he would ask DE to get someone to check. SL added that she was concerned about risk and if DE were needed to assist. SM added that she thought the DE should step in. The CEO said he would be talking to GF about this and was not aware that Zara was leaving until last week. SM said the support of DE would be recommended. The Chair enquired if there was a cost implication of getting DE involved in the accounts. The CEO indicated that previous staff were seconded and the Council paid their salaries plus VAT. The Chair asked that this should go on the Risk Register. BM highlighted the need for a permanent person to be second signatory and this is a safeguarding issue. The CEO agreed and added that he would like the arrangement set out in the finance manual to be in place. He discussed arrangements for payroll and said that the replacement for ZD would deal with sub cover. The CEO said he would pursue the replacement posts and would keep the Committee updated. The Chair asked for a proposal.

RB indicated that some of these questions were raised by ARAC and the report provided to this Committee was almost the same as the ARAC report and that ARAC have been assured that F&GP are looking at finances. He said that no profit and loss and expense accounts have not been presented and said that the Committee has not been provided on details of interest earned. He noted his concern that the F&CM has left the organization for a considerable time and has not been replaced and that the Financial Admin appears to be doing the job of the F&CM. He said the Committee should be asking for detailed reports. He asked about the accommodation rent and maintenance charges.

SMcE said she shared RB’s concerns and said DE assistance was needed on finance. The CEO said that the Finance Officer was not doing anything outside her normal job. He indicated that he would discuss half year reports at the meeting before Christmas but if the Committee wants detailed statements these can be provided at meetings if wanted. The job is advertised through Agencies and that ARAC and F&GP received the best reports that could be done in time.

BM said that the PRRC were concerned by welfare of staff including the CEO and said it was imperative we get DE assistance. No one wants pressure put on the shoulders of one person. The Chair enquired who would compile the half year report and the CEO said he was expecting to have a new F&CM by now. SL asked if the request for help is successful would this be immediate. The CEO indicated he would expect the person to start as soon as possible. The CEO indicated that a half year detailed report is provided. SL asked if it was a risk that these reports are not provided every month. The CEO said it is a small organization and if expenses are out of line it would be flagged up. BM said that it was worrying and that DE sent a relatively junior member to PRRC and no one is in attendance today. The CEO said he would ask next week. The PA outlined her email correspondence with DE on Friday. CEO to look at contingency arrangements with DE. The Chair said he thought the organization was in a panic position and this should be included in the Risk Register. The CEO said he would include this for Council.

DB stated that she had been in this Committee previously and had been provided with more information and said GTCNI had not got a good reputation and DE support should be requested as a matter of urgency. JH said that DE’s participation is vital. Members agreed that DE should be at all meetings.

BM enquired if internal and external audit had been made aware of the staffing problem and the CEO advised that they had. The Chair said he was concerned that the MOM had been cancelled and DE unable to attend today. The CEO is to have a meeting with DE at the end of the week.

BM enquired about Fraud, Bribery and Whistleblowing. He asked how the CEO would know about this and if DE supplied him with the information. The CEO advised he was unaware of anything. BM asked if there was a conflict of interest and the CEO indicated that if there was anything concerning him then Internal Audit would inform the Chair. The Chair added that the Whistleblowing Policy should be reviewed. RB indicated that the Permanent Secretary had indicated that whistleblowing should go through his office. The Chair said that the policy needs revisited and the CEO is to clarify with Internal Audit. BM advised he had received some correspondence on 3 September but it was a complaint and not whistleblowing.

Members discussed the reviewing of policies and the CEO said that HR policies are being worked on at the moment, they are mostly reviewed annually and any amendments brought to Council. SM suggested in insert for clarity. BM added concerns that the lack of staff was detrimental of the organization. The CEO said there was a trait that people wish to raise matters through other routes.

Members discussed the confidentiality of Zoom meetings particularly in relation to recordings and discussed consequences. SL enquired about the timescale of complaints.

DB enquired why there was no mention in the report of regarding the registration of new teachers and the CEO said it was in the agenda. Members discussed the policy for dealing with complaints which was created prior to the CEO joining the organization. The CEO said he could not get involved in addressing the complaint and neither could the Chair. SMcE said that a hierarchy for complaints needs to be in place.

Comfort Break 12.20 – 12.25

Staffing issues

The CEO was asked about problems accessing the framework for agency staff and the CEO advised that CPD had to be contacted and contracts worked through and highlighted difficulties with recruitment agencies and added this was a new framework which was put in place.

The CEO informed members that staff absences were within acceptable limits and that the organization works on a 6% rate and that long term absences have been very low. He said that during the last year absence rates had fallen.

Members discussed on how the SEO would be replaced and what risks would be faced in the absence of staff. The CEO advised that the SEO would be replaced with a Professional Services Officer. Members discussed the Appeals Process and how this would be serviced so a temporary arrangement may need to be made. The CEO indicated that he would like recruitment completed by the end of the financial year. SL enquired if a temporary role could be created and BM said that someone senior would be needed. The CEO outlined the staffing roles needed for the organization, saying that he had two registration officers lined up to start and there had been a meeting earlier in the week with the SEO and J McStravick and at present there were only 2 ½ members working in the registration team and it would be like this for the next two weeks. So the question is when to accommodate these people for training.

Members discussed what should be done in the short term and it was highlighted that after the SEO left, someone would be needed to deal with panels. It was also noted that he was acting as line manager to the registration team and staff members could not complain as they would have no manager. The CEO said there would be discussions with DE over staffing arrangements. BM highlighted that a senior person and signatory is leaving and incoming people could be temporary and could not act as signatory. The CEO said he would be addressing this with DE on contingency. BM stressed that it is a worry there would be no F&CM and SEO. The CEO said the key was to replace the Registration Manager and F&CM. DB enquired if staff issues had been raised at other committees. The CEO said there is a risk on the Corporate Risk Register on staffing and highlighted the poor attendance of the previous Registration Manager and said that if regulation takes place then staff will be needed. Members discussed bringing in new staff and the problems with training and the CEO said that registrations for July/August need to be closed off.

BM outlined the proposal to the HR Committee regarding overtime advising that at present staff could only take time off for extra time worked and it had been proposed to pay them. He said that Council could meet if needed. The CEO advised of the lack of an overtime policy and outlined the present working situation regarding overtime. He advised that because of Covid people had been allowed to carry over extra time but that staff are accruing days and there is a need to ascertain what overtime could be paid.

SL said she was not confident that the organisation is not at risk regarding the replacement of the SEO. The CEO said that there was only one appeal case this year and outlined the process for members. SL reiterated that she was concerned about the risk as the SEO is leaving on 26 October. The CEO said that a member of Council could be nominated and that a panel of PRRC could make a decision as to a persons application.

SL enquired on who makes the decision on the SEO’s role. The CEO outlined the role of the SEO and said he was conscious of time. The Chair added his concern that there was no support for the Project Manager. The CEO advised that he had been asking for support for months and outlined the situation within the registration team and said he would be having a meeting with the Project Manager tomorrow.

BM highlighted that the role of the SEO includes Complaints Officer, Data Protection Officer, Senior Education Officer (including contact with the HEI’s), Signatory to bank accounts, overseeing elections, accreditation of qualifications and reviews of decision. He was 19 years in the organization and it was a great risk to lose this corporate knowledge and was a significant loss. There would be no backfill for this.

SM said that the SEO’s position was very strong and suggested bringing the SEO back as freelance as a temporary fix and asked if this could be an option. RB said he had raised the staff shortage with the CEO at the ARAC meeting and had been assured there was no problem. He highlighted that teachers cannot get into jobs as the organization does not have the staff to do this. He indicated another ARAC meeting may be needed.

6. Audit Plan and Internal and External Audit Report Update

It was requested to allow Internal Audit 8 days to allow them to function. BM asked for this to be endorsed.

Proposed BM

Seconded: SL

The Chair said that issues and recommendations would need additional time and asked if approval was being rushed. The CEO advised there needs to be approval and the other plan had been approved by ARAC and he thought the Committee should approve. He said there is a risk that things may change regarding the independent Review of Council. Any change would need to be agreed with ARAC and F&GP. RB agreed with the CEO and said otherwise Internal Audit would not be able to do its job.

Members agreed.

The Chair thanked new members for their input.

RB suggested rescheduling meeting to get the rest of business done prior to Council. The Chair asked if all in favour.

It was agreed that the next meeting be scheduled for Tuesday 5 October.

Meeting ended.

ACTIONS ARISING

1. CEO to follow up on payment for printing of papers for members.

2. HR Provider – CEO to circulate Project Evaluation.

3. NIPSA correspondence – to be put on agenda for Council meeting

4. Motion Presented. CEO to follow up prior to Council meeting.

5. Registration Systems Project Board to be added to agenda for next Council meeting.

6. Accommodation – to be added to agenda for next Council meeting

7. Training dates – to be circulated by CEO

8. CEO to address report on databreach

9. Staffing – CEO to look at contingency plans with DE

10. Staffing – CEO to amend risk register

11. Whistleblowing Policy – CEO to clarify with internal audit