

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STAFFING COMMITTEE OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF SOUTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE HELD ON TUESDAY 4 MAY 2021 AT 17.30 VIA TELECONFERENCE.

PRESENT:

Mr Scott Alexander, Chair
Mr Gordon Gough
Mr John Nugent
Dr Eileen Stewart
Mrs Nicola Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr Andrew Saunders, Governing Body Chair
Mr Raymond Sloan, Director of Client Services
Mrs Ann Marie Hughes, Assistant Director Human Resources and Development
Miss Lindsay Armstrong, Secretary to the Governing Body

The meeting convened at 17.32.

A01. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Brian Doran.

On behalf of the Committee, Mr Alexander requested that their sincere condolences be passed on to Mrs Doran and her family at this sad time.

A02. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair reminded those present to declare at the start of the meeting any conflicts with regard to matters to be discussed.

No interests were declared.

A03. MINUTES OF THE MEETING 2 MARCH 2021

The Chair referred Members to the minutes of the meeting of 2 March 2021 for accuracy. These were approved on proposal from Dr Stewart and seconded by Mr Gough.

A04. MATTERS ARISING

Members were informed that the IOSH Leading Safety course is scheduled for June 2021.

A05. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

None.

A06. CAREER BREAK REPORTS

None.

A07. REMOTE WORKING SURVEY RESULTS

Mrs Hughes advised that the College invited staff to take part in a survey to assess the impact of remote working, with queries centred around productivity and job satisfaction, communication and working relationships, boundaries with home life, health and

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wellbeing, work related stress and anxiety and isolation. She informed that the survey yielded a 37% response rate. Mrs Hughes advised on the range of questions asked and informed on additional narrative received.

Mrs Hughes confirmed that the benefits of remote working rated highly in the areas of reduced / no commute, more flexibility and saved time. She advised that the biggest challenges of remote working were stated to be difficulty switching off, taking less breaks and working longer hours. Mrs Hughes advised that the results yielded that productivity remained more or less the same, and there was a slight increase in job satisfaction.

Mrs Hughes informed that team meetings were continuing as normal throughout remote working and advised that respondents reported that communication with colleagues had improved and was more regular. She advised that the results informed that only 34% of respondents switched their cameras on during meetings, citing reasons associated with technical or bandwidth issues, or simply because their colleagues did not either.

Mrs Hughes advised that some respondents commented that they struggled with smaller screens or missed having two screens, with others stating that they did not have access to a scanner, printer or other device. Mrs Hughes informed that going forward the distribution of IT equipment should improve.

Mrs Hughes informed that 93% of respondents felt supported by their team and line manager during remote working, and positive results were seen in work-life balance suggesting a hybrid arrangement of remote and site working will be championed going forward.

Mr Gough questioned the benefits that may be felt by the student body, advising on personal experience of an increase in connectivity. Mrs Hughes referred Members to the commentary informing of mixed reaction on student engagement and advised that onsite learning can vary greatly between course groups. She informed Members that the Director of Curriculum had tasked the curriculum managers to undertake a piece of research to gauge the learners' experience of remote working. Mr Nugent recommended that the results of the staff survey and student research are presented to the full Governing Body and reviewed in conjunction with each other.

Mr Alexander remarked on the contradictory results in relation to remote working and the corresponding bearing this had on stress levels, anxiety and depression. He further noted the differential in staffs' opinion on the choice to work remotely. Mr Alexander highlighted that many staff had remarked on interruptions whilst working remotely and acknowledged that home schooling, or other reasons linked to lockdown, will have influenced this.

Mrs Hughes concurred that certain feedback is at odds with each other, advising that not all posts lend themselves to remote working plus not everybody provided comment to their responses. Mrs Hughes also advised that some of the above opinions referred to by Mr Alexander may not be attributed directly to work as during the lockdown periods many people were and still are unable to be with their loved ones which has had an impact on stress and anxiety levels.

She stated that support staff may wish to adopt a hybrid of remote working and informed that further work needs to be undertaken to assess criteria including equipment needs and responsibility for self-care.

Mrs Wilson commented on the need to address concerns around isolation and queried changes in output. Mrs Hughes informed that some concern was relayed by line managers in the initial lockdown due to unpreparedness, however advised that having

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extended an offer for staff to come on site in instances of connectivity or other issues, very little concerns have been expressed by managers in terms of productivity.

Mr Sloan advised that the initial lockdown had presented a unique challenge, clarifying that individual job roles such as caretaking and technical services were unable to deliver close to normal levels of productivity. He informed that flexibility was increased in lockdowns 2 and 3 and he is comfortable reporting that staff productivity has not dropped since. Members were advised that proposals are being considered to extend the Flexible Working policy to include an application for remote working.

Mr Saunders recommended that management adopt a holistic view when setting the objectives. Mr Gough concurred, advising that careful deliberation needs to be applied to the impact on the student body.

Mrs Hughes agreed with the statements, affirming that consideration must be given to individual staff roles, and advising that Covid-19 has demonstrated that many staff are capable of working efficiently and effectively offsite.

Mr Alexander recommended that careful attention be given to the differences that will arise between support and lecturing staffs' suitability for remote working, with an emphasis placed on the bearing this may have on learners.

Mrs Hughes commended the work undertaken by her colleague, Mrs Nutt in producing the report.

A08. COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

Mrs Hughes referred Members to the Competency Framework document and advised that the paper has been developed to further detail the knowledge, skills and behaviours required by staff working within the College and feeds into the processes connected to recruitment and selection, induction, probation, performance management, learning and development and career progression.

Mrs Hughes informed that key themes have been grouped into six core competencies; skills and expertise, communication, working with people and team working, customer focus and continuous improvement, planning and organisation and leadership and strategic thinking. Mrs Hughes advised on information assigned to differing levels and examples aligned to effective and ineffective behaviour. She stated that the College is seeking the Committee's approval to implement the policy.

Members remarked on a good piece of work and the importance of staff being aware of the necessary behaviours for career progression.

In response to a query from Mr Saunders, Members were advised that the document will be issued to Trade Unions and staff for consultation. The Committee discussed the pros and cons of adopting a competency based approach, how it may assist the appraisal process and unintended limitations on recruitment that may arise.

Members approved the framework, commenting on the importance of clear communication of the competency behaviours to staff and recommended that the document be referred to the full Governing Body.

Mrs Hughes commended the work undertaken by her colleagues Helen O'Connor and Petra McGuirk in developing and producing the Competency Framework.

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A09. KPIs IN YEAR REPORT

Mrs Hughes presented the KPI report detailing the period September 2020 to March 2021 with comparison figures from previous years. She informed on 1 grievance, 1 disciplinary hearing and 1 formal counselling case and advised that all three have concluded. Mrs Hughes confirmed that no harassment cases have been raised during the period and provided an update on career break requests.

Members noted the report and were advised that sickness absence is well below target.

A10. DRAFT EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021 - 2022

Mrs Hughes referred Members to the draft Employee Development Plan and informed on challenges that have arisen due to Covid-19. She advised on developments relating to Project Based Learning.

Mrs Hughes informed on planned activity and provided detail on the induction programme and probation process and the development of a range of mandatory online training modules. She advised on opportunities to upskill and development activity for support staff and management and leadership programmes.

Mrs Hughes advised on an assortment of health and safety training programmes including IOSH leading and managing safety and fire warden training. Members were informed of the principles of the Health and Wellbeing Charter namely physical, psychological and social.

Mr Alexander remarked on a good piece of work.

A11. INVESTORS IN PEOPLE AND HEALTH AND WELLBEING UPDATE

Mrs Hughes referred Members to the updated action plan and reminded the Committee that IIP accreditation has been postponed to next May.

The Committee noted the report.

A12. ANNUAL FAIR EMPLOYMENT RETURN

Mrs Hughes confirmed that the Annual Fair Employment Return has been submitted and referred Members to the summary of differentials detailing recruited staff, applicants, promotes and leavers' gender and community background.

The committee noted the report.

A13. ARTICLE 55

Members reviewed the planned Article 55 submission and in response to a query from Mr Gough, Mrs Hughes advised that there has been no feedback from the Equality Commission and representation from both communities is in line with what would be expected.

Mr Gough enquired at what point would affirmative action be required, and commented on his unease that the threshold may be closing in.

Mrs Hughes advised that for benchmarking means, the Southern Trust is comparable in terms in terms of size and geographical location, and informed that the two organisations are largely in line in terms of community background representation.

Members agreed that the principle of merit is paramount and recommended that the document is referred to the full Governing Body.

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Mrs Hughes advised that the triannual report is based on the 2011 census figures and a more accurate picture will emerge in coming years.

Mr Alexander commented that a line graph would assist Members in being able to clarify the data. Mr Sloan advised that feedback from the Equality Commission will be provided at the next meeting of the Staffing Committee.

Mrs Hughes

A14. CEF CIRCULARS

None to report.

A15. POLICY REVIEW

- **Management and Employee Standards**
- **Recruitment of Ex-Offenders**
- **Special Leave of Absence**
- **Grievance Procedure for Support Staff**

Members noted minor amendments to the four policies.

- **Equality & Good Relations – Staff & Students**
- **Health & Wellbeing – Staff & Students**

Members noted the merger of the staff and student policies.

Members discussed the range of tools to assist managers to take reasonable steps to recognise signs of poor mental health.

The Committee approved all six policies.

A16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

A17. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Members considered moving the next meeting of the Staffing Committee to 21 September 2021. Miss Armstrong to confirm the agreed date.

Miss Armstrong

The meeting concluded at 18.34.

CHAIR

DATE