

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF SOUTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE HELD ON TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2020 AT 17.30 VIA TELECONFERENCE.

PRESENT:

Mrs Teresa Campbell (Chair)
Mr Brian Doran
Mr Tom Redmond
Mr Kieran Swail
Mrs Judith Thompson

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr Terry McGonigal, Director of Finance and Planning
Ms Joanne McGuigan, Assistant Director of Finance
Mr Raymond Sloan, Director of Client Services
Mrs Kerri Farrell, Head of Estates
Mr Paul Donaghy, Health & Safety Manager
Mr Brendan McGuigan, Boardroom Apprentice
Miss Lindsay Armstrong, Secretary to the Governing Body

The meeting convened at 17.30.

A01. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Andrew Saunders.

A02. DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The Chair reminded those present to declare at the commencement of the meeting any conflict of interests held in any matter to be discussed. No interests were declared.

Mr Swail advised Members of an addition to his entry within the Register of Interests.

Mr Sloan thanked Members of the Committee for permitting the presence of staff from the Estates Team to present papers and address queries, and apologised for the late submission of the Estates Budget paper.

A15 HEALTH & SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT

Mrs Farrell presented the Annual Report on Health & Safety and welcomed Mr Donaghy to the College as the new Health & Safety Manager.

Mrs Farrell advised Members that as SRC campuses were required to close at the end of March 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, only necessary staff came on site to open and close the buildings for essential maintenance and provide managed access as required by other staff. She advised on measures taken to reopen the buildings and work undertaken to get the new build campuses in Banbridge and Armagh operational.

Mrs Farrell informed that a new occurrence reporting system was introduced in August 2019 to replace the former convoluted accident reporting system in an effort to encourage staff to report all accidents, incidents and near misses. She provided a breakdown of occurrence data reported during the 2019-2020 academic year.

Members noted that a total 73 occurrences were reported in 2019-2020 compared with 77 in 2018-2019 and 134 in 2017-2018. Mrs Farrell clarified that the 2017-2018 data is not comparable as a proportion of the figure relates to first aid response.

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Mrs Farrell advised that two RIDDOR reportable incidents involving staff members were reported during the year and concerned a fall down stairs resulting in a fractured arm and a member of staff who reported feeling unwell upon return from an overseas trip.

Mrs Farrell informed that there have been eight liability claims over the past five years with associated estimates or payments in excess of £10,000. She informed on a significant increase in College insurance liability from the previous year in the region of £86k and advised that SRC has the largest number of claims made against it in the sector and also the most expensive claim outlays.

Mrs Farrell provided an update on the HASMAP compliance map and informed that although C-19 and the government imposed lockdown slowed progress, basic compliance has increased from 89% to 91%, substantial compliance has increased from 80% to 84% and high compliance has increased from 66% to 70%.

Members noted the health and safety priorities for 2020-2021 and the College's commitment to the continuous improvement of health and safety performance.

Mr Redmond remarked on the encouraging momentum offset by serious mitigating factors. Mr Sloan advised that the outcome of discussion with the Audit Committee Chair concerning listing health and safety as a potential audit area, resulted in a postponement of the audit as part of the 2020-2021 strategy. He informed that the decision was based on continued engagement with Walter Marks to allow a thorough review of practices.

Mrs Campbell remarked on a good report and requested further information regarding the percentage increase on insurance liability. Ms McGuigan confirmed that the previous year's insurance was £140k representing an estimated 60% increase.

Members noted the report and discussion took place regarding charity status, self-insurance and NDPB status.

A16a POLICY REVIEW

- **Health & Safety policy and procedure**
- **Health & Safety policy statement**

Mrs Farrell referred Members to amendments proposed to the Health and Safety policy and procedure to clarify the duties assigned to Heads of Faculties, the Health & Safety Manager and the College Management Team.

The policy was approved on proposal from Mr Redmond and seconded by Mr Swail.

A21 ESTATES BUDGET PAPER

Mrs Farrell presented the Estates Plan for the financial year 2020-2021 and forward years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 and advised on work delivered to ensure buildings were Covid ready. She informed that the proposed Craigavon campus is currently on hold due to the ongoing judicial review and the OBC for the proposed purchase and redevelopment of the Newry Sports Centre has been submitted to the Department for approval.

Members reviewed the schedule of planned works and were advised on proposals to address brickwork issues on the Newry East campus. The Committee noted the planned works and recurrent expenditure and further acknowledged that due to the fact that a great many estates work are scheduled to take place during the summer months, the costs of many projects straddle two financial years.

Mrs McGuigan advised that the planned works will be subject to available funding.

A20. SUSTAINABILITY REPORT

Mrs Farrell presented the Sustainability report and informed on the significant achievement of attaining certification of BREEAM excellence for Armagh at a score of 72.55% and Banbridge new build campus at a score of 72.12%. She advised on the College's proposal to build a new campus in Craigavon which will in turn increase the College's overall estate to BREEAM excellence standard.

Mrs Farrell provided information in relation to environmental sustainability with regard to retrofit, utilities, waste and disposal and procurement, and informed on planned sustainability priorities for the 2020-2021 academic year including replacement of existing lighting at the Newry campuses.

A detailed discussion took place with Members noting planned engagement with the student union and individual faculties to assess areas of responsibility and communicate good practice.

Committee Members thanked the members of the Estates Team for their comprehensive reports, voicing their appreciation and acknowledging that a great deal of work has been undertaken under difficult circumstances and further complicated by the impact of Covid-19. Members welcomed Mr Donaghy to the College.

Mr Sloan, Mrs Farrell and Mr Donaghy left the meeting at 18.18.

A03. MINUTES OF MEETING 26 MAY 2020

The Chair referred Members to the minutes of the committee meeting held on 26 May 2020. These were checked for accuracy and unanimously approved on the proposal of Mr Swail and seconded by Mrs Thompson, subject to a minor amendment to reflect that the Committee meeting was held online via MS TEAMS.

A04. MATTERS ARISING

None.

A05. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

Mrs Campbell noted the results of the Governors Skills Audit, acknowledged the impact of the projected skills deficit on the membership of the Finance & General Purposes Committee and advised that action will be taken to actively address any issues identified.

A06. FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

Mrs Campbell referred Members to the Annual Committee report for the 2019-2020 academic year detailing items approved, monitored and additional areas of work undertaken. Members reviewed the self-assessment outcomes noting that the number of Committee Members is appropriate, the Committee has the right balance of skills and expertise to enable it to function effectively and key issues and discussions arising from the Committee meetings are of sufficient detail.

One Member identified a training requirement to assist in their understanding of the Committee's work and Members commented that the Finance and General Purposes Committee is very efficiently run and the Chair conducts business in a competent manner.

Members were advised that the whistleblowing disclosure received in October alleging fraud was investigated under provision of the anti-fraud policy as directed by the Department.

The Annual Report was approved on the proposal of Mr Swail and seconded by Mr Redmond.

A07. FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

Members agreed that the Terms of Reference as currently constituted remain appropriate. No changes were proposed and the TORs were approved on proposal from Mr Swail and seconded by Mrs Thompson.

A08. REGISTER OF INTERESTS 2020-2021

Members reviewed the Register of Interests for the 2020-2021 academic year noting that the Register will be subject to amendment due to changes in circumstances or personnel.

A09. DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT AND STATUTORY ACCOUNTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31 JULY 2020

Mr McGonigal presented the draft Annual Report and Statutory Accounts for the period ended 31 July 2020 and referred Members to the Statement of Comprehensive Income and Expenditure. He advised that income has risen £2m on the previous year and expenditure increased by £5.5m, and advised that this is mainly attributed to depreciation.

Mr McGonigal referred the Committee to actuarial gain in respect of the pension scheme of approximately £16m as a result of the McCloud / Sargeant court ruling.

Members reviewed the Balance Sheet noting an increase of £12.3m net under tangible fixed assets, a significant increase in pension provisions and adjustments in relation to the new builds.

Mrs McGuigan advised that communication regarding the auditing of the accounts has proved more of a challenge remotely, however advised that it is unlikely that any concerns will be raised in the Report to Those Charge With Governance.

Mr Doran confirmed that the Accounts will be presented to the Governing Body on 3 November for review before being tabled at the Audit Committee together with the Report to Those Charge With Governance. He informed that the data regarding student outcome is currently under review due to the challenges that have arisen due to Covid-19.

The Committee noted the report.

A10. SRC MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS (inc WORKING CAPITAL REPORT)

Ms McGuigan presented the Management Accounts for the period ending July 2020 detailing the College's financial position and remarked on an excellent final outturn. Members reviewed the summary of expenditure by budget holder and the analysis of working capital. Ms McGuigan advised on the impact of projects suspended and informed that the College have not been aggressive in recovering debt in consideration of the economic uncertainties that have arisen due to the current health pandemic.

Mrs Thompson voiced her endorsement of the position, remarking that it is an entirely appropriate decision given the current circumstances.

Members reviewed the analysis of aged debtors, aged creditors and credit card reports and were advised on a delay on delivery of goods recorded within the prompt payment report.

Members reviewed the PTL tracker report and were advised that an underspend relating to vacant posts has been offset by an overspend on part time lecturers.

Members noted the information.

A11. GOVERNING BODY BUDGET 2019-2020 REPORT

Members noted an overall 5% underspend in the Governing Body budget with significant underspend attributed to travel expenses, office requisites and hospitality.

A12. DfE FINANCIAL RETURNS

Mr McGonigal presented the DfE Financial Returns referring Members to a significant underspend in the first five months as a result of Covid-19.

- **Covid Response Resource Allocation**

Mr McGonigal referred Members to the Departmental letter detailing Covid-19 pressure resource allocation and advised that SRC has been allocated 28% of the sector funding to assist in expenditure mainly relating to the required provision of laptops, licensing, headsets and cameras.

Mrs Campbell commented on a positive result.

A13. INDICATIVE BUDGET

Mr McGonigal presented the draft budget report and commented on difficult circumstances due to the health pandemic and the straddling of two financial years. He advised on accounting adjustments made to reflect depreciation, staff costs and Covid pressures.

Mr McGonigal advised that the budget paper will be presented to future meetings of the Finance & General Purposes Committee to keep under review. The budget paper detailing the indicative resource requirements was approved on the proposal of Mrs Campbell and seconded by Mr Redmond.

A14. DIRECT AWARD CONTRACTS

Mr McGonigal informed that there are no new Direct Award Contracts to report and advised Members of a query arising at the Audit Committee if the purchase of acrylic screens, as previously reported to the Governing Body, should be reported as a DAC. He advised that he is taking advice on the recommendation to determine if a DAC is required.

A16. POLICY REVIEW

- **Fees policy & procedure**
- **Fees Schedule**

Ms McGuigan presented the Fees policy and Schedule of Charges. She informed that there are no recommended changes to the policy however advised on proposals to

changes to liability fees on withdrawal from courses in line with sector policy and incremental fee increases.

Mr Swail stated that it is important to note the substantial savings ascribed to studying at a College of Further and Higher Education compared to attending University and recommended that value for money be clearly communicated.

Ms McGuigan advised Members on financial assistance that can be obtained through the Hardship Fund and FE Grants.

The amendments were approved on proposal from Mr Redmond and seconded by Mrs Thompson.

Mr Redmond left the meeting at 19.16.

A17. CIRCULARS

- **07 20 Care to Learn (NI) scheme**
- **04 20 FE Grants**
- **05 20 Hardship Fund**

Mr Doran referred Members to the Departmental circulars and advised on their use to inform College policy.

A18. COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS ANNUAL REPORT

- **Update month end September 2020**

Mr McGonigal presented the Complaint and Compliments report year end analysis and advised that in terms of overall numbers of instances of negative feedback, the total of 48 is reduced slightly on the previous year.

He advised on 13 formal complaints, 29 informal complaints and 6 comments received during the academic year and provided data on course type, campus and process area.

Mr McGonigal informed that 9 complaints / negative comments have been received in the current academic year and advised on 2 data incidents and 3 subject access requests.

Members noted the report, remarking favourably on the compliments and positive feedback report.

A19. UPDATED BANK MANDATE

Mr McGonigal presented the updated Bank Mandate amended to reflect a change in personnel. The amendments were endorsed on proposal from Mrs Campbell and seconded by Mr Swail.

A22. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mrs Campbell asked that her thanks and appreciation be passed onto members of staff for their hard work and dedication in difficult circumstances.

A23. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of Finance and General Purposes Committee is scheduled to take place on Tuesday 19 January 2021 at 17.30 via teleconference.

The meeting concluded at 19.22.



CHAIR

DATE