

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 8 April 2024 on Microsoft Teams commencing at 4.00pm.

Present: Mr I Murphy (Chair), Mr M Higgins, Mrs C McGovern, Ms D McIlwaine, Mr R McKernan

In Attendance: Mrs C Brown, Ms D Kearney, Mr S Lavery, Mr M Lennox, Mrs C Murdoch, Mr G O'Loughlin, Mr J Ross, Ms J Small

Mrs K Wallace (Secretary)

39.1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed Mr Garry O'Loughlin, newly appointed Head of Finance, to the meeting.

An apology was received for Mrs Taggart.

39.2 Declaration of Interests

None.

39.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The draft minutes of the meeting on 22 January 2024 were approved.

Proposed: Mrs C McGovern Seconded: Mr Murphy

39.4 Matters Arising

The Principal updated Committee on plans for the communications team to progress the staff survey before the end of the academic year, following completion of lecturers' pay negotiations.

39.5 Chair's Communications / Correspondence

None.

4.08pm Mrs Murdoch joined the meeting.

39.6 IT Update

In the context of the report presented, Mr Ross highlighted cyber security as the current key issue, with the first assessment for cyber essentials at the end of May. He outlined the process for managing access by personal devices, especially for students, and confirmed that an appropriate level of security would be put in place to ensure risk is minimised.

In response to members' questions, Mr Ross summarised disaster recovery, reporting and current training arrangements for cyber security.

The Chair felt strongly that training should be carried out more frequently than at present and Mr McKernan and Mrs McGovern echoed his concern.

Mr Ross was happy to take on Committee's request for more frequent training but stressed the balance to be achieved so as not to overwhelm staff. He reassured the Chair that current training on FOI was to ensure that no previous communication or embedded information was included in any response. Encryption of documentation was also encouraged.

The Principal referred to a training event he had recently attended and would share the summary with Mr Ross.

In relation to serious public sector cyber incidents, Mr Lavery advised that document security procedures were being looked at by the FE sector and would be used to inform the IT system going forward, while lessons learned had been fed into College processes.

The Chair thanked Mr Ross for his extensive work on cyber security and looked forward to gaining cyber essentials accreditation.

39.7 Sale of Land

Committee considered the proposal put forward by Mr Lennox for disposal of part of land at Larne campus, which was surplus to requirements.

The Principal outlined the context to an official request by Larne YMCA to purchase the land, which would be used to facilitate appropriate disabled access.

In response to members' questions, Mr Lennox was confident that sale of the land would not result in any issues in relation to environment, access or rights-of-way for the College, which would be confirmed by solicitors.

Action: Committee agreed to support the proposal for disposal of land in principle.

The Principal advised members on current leasing arrangements for Larne campus with the social enterprise organisation AEL. Following a formal request for an extension to the lease and alternative ownership arrangements Mr Higgins outlined the process which would be used to consider all options and suggested that governors meet with AEL to hear their proposal.

Action: The Secretary would organise a date in May for the meeting at Larne campus

4.48 Mr Lennox and Mr Ross left the meeting.

39.8 Finance Update

Mr Laverty presented the finance update and clarified pressure at 31 March 2024, treatment of which would be advised by the Department. He explained that extra minor capital funding of £668k recently received was not shown in the report and that all extra money for new bids had now been accessed.

Members noted that no indicative budget for 2024/25 had been received to date and it was hoped more information would be available in early May, following a meeting with the Department and Principals.

Mrs McGovern referred to lack of sight of management accounts over past months and emphasised the importance of these being made available to Committee and Chairs. Mr Laverty agreed that recent pressure on the College due to the increased audit requirements, coupled with staff vacancies, had affected the monthly reporting of management accounts. However, as audit demands had now been fulfilled and new staffing arrangements put in place, it was hoped that full management accounts would be completed within the next 4 weeks. These would be provided to Committee as soon as possible, with balance sheet information provided annually. Members noted that the Head of Finance was now in place; a temporary accountant would start with the College on 9 April; and the new College Accountant would start on 15 April 2024.

In relation to the 2024/25 budget, Mrs McGovern queried the impact on plans for students as a result of uncertainty.

The Principal outlined a shift by the Department in notifying FE budget allocations over the past 3-4 years due to annual budgets and uncertainty on funding allocations which resulted in difficulty for forward planning and commitments. He anticipated a flat cash budget for the coming year and hoped that some of the savings being made through the VES would be made available.

Mr Higgins commended the finance team on achieving additional minor capital funding and confirmed that a revised budget letter guidance from the Department was awaited on to cover the pay award.

The Chair noted that no NDPB had received a budget to date.

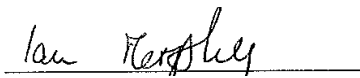
39.9 Any Other Business

The Chair thanked Ms Kearney for her work for the College and wished her well for the future. Mr Laverty concurred and welcomed Mr O'Loughlin as Head of Finance.

39.10 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of Committee would be held on 10 June 2024.

The meeting ended at 5.03pm.

Mr I Murphy 

Date 10 June 2024

(Chair)

Mrs K Wallace 

(Secretary)