

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 10 June 2024 on Microsoft Teams commencing at 4.00pm.

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

In Attendance: Mrs C Brown, Mrs D Kerr, Mr S Lavery, Mrs C Murdoch, Mr G O'Loughlin, Mr J Ross

Secretary: Mrs K Wallace

40.1 Welcome and Apologies

An apology was received for Mrs Taggart and members noted that Mrs McGovern was now on maternity leave.

40.2 Declaration of Interests

None.

40.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The draft minutes of the meeting on 8 April 2024 were approved.

Proposed: Mr McKernan

Seconded: Mr Higgins

40.4 Matters Arising

None.

40.5 Chair's Communications / Correspondence

The Chair updated members on the meeting held on-site with AEL at the Larne campus on 14 May and options on leasing arrangements being considered. He advised AEL's request for an early decision, to enable them to progress prior to Christmas. The Chair sought members' views on the options.

Members expressed their support for the work being done by AEL but were cognisant of the need to minimise risk to the College, whilst ensuring continuation of the educational service in Larne.

Action: The Committee agreed to extend the AEL lease for a minimum of 10 years, subject to final legal advice and the meeting with the other interested party, and to take this proposal to the GB for endorsement.

The Principal referred to a recent adjournment debate in the Assembly on a related matter and had asked the college involved to share their findings and lessons learned. He also

advised an upcoming meeting with an interested party following which members would be better informed on the basis for moving forward.

In response to a question from Mrs McIlwaine, the Chair advised that the decision on the strip of land requested by YMCA has been approved by the Committee.

The Chair's request for decision to be advised to AEL in September was noted.

Action: Mr Lavery would explore all options available to the College and bring to Committee in September before responding to AEL.

Consideration was given to the Department's letter to NIFON on the change of college accounting dates.

Mr Lavery summarised communication on this issue to date and advised the likelihood that FE Principals would be moving to a March year-end.

The Chair shared his view on the Department's rationale for the change in date and on the NIAO timeline for carrying out audits.

The Principal noted the impact for colleges' provision of annual student reporting which, as a result, would not align to the March year-end.

The report was noted.

40.6 CDP Progress Report

Mrs Kerr spoke to the report, which had previously been considered by the Education Committee. She referred to limitations on full assurance of data accuracy, as outlined, which had been previously discussed with the Department.

Members noted the ongoing red risk for HE in FE and Mrs Kerr advised that partnership with the OU would provide the opportunity for new provision. Mrs Brown confirmed the ambition to achieve target figures for full time HE enrolments.

The Chair referred to risk of action in the next academic year and the need to have a plan in place to mitigate for possible impact. In response to his query on falling ESOL enrolments, Mrs Kerr clarified the effect from discontinuous provision of free travel for Asylum Seekers.

Mrs McIlwaine noted disparities on figures used across KPIs in the report and the need for standardisation of reporting. Mrs Kerr advised that she would feed back this request to the Department, who pre-populate this information.

Action: Mrs Kerr would ask the Department for future standardisation of figures in the report.

Mrs Kerr left the meeting at 4.34pm.

40.7 Introduction to IT Services

Mr Ross presented his report and gave an overview of key topics including network and connectivity; College hardware estate; College IT systems; IT services team and functions; and cyber security.

In relation to the Janet network, Mr Ross highlighted the extensive, well supported network which provides exceptionally good connectivity and security. He advised that, as part of the accreditation process for cyber essentials, a full scan of the network would be carried out at the end of June. In relation to cyber security, he noted a 99% compliance rate for patching and the College's expertise in automated patching.

Mr Lavery commended the work carried out by Mr Ross and the IT team on cyber essentials preparations and achieving the top position across the FE sector on patching.

In response to questions from Mr McKernan, Mr Ross clarified the role of the Janet Network in providing infrastructure for all colleges and universities in the UK; a 9-12 month timeline for the College to achieve a 'zero trust' baseline; and annual training and quarterly monitoring carried out for staff and students. Members noted that an incident response process was also in place.

The Principal thanked Mr Ross for the update and assurance on the systems in place. He wished the team well for going forward with cyber essentials accreditation and looked forward to sharing the external report with Committee when available at the end of July.

Mr Ross left the meeting at 4.55pm.

40.8 HR Update

Mrs Murdoch spoke to her report for the period to May 2024 and noted improvements in long term sickness absence rates, increased participation in health and wellbeing activities and settlement of pay negotiations with the TUs acceptance of a revised pay offer.

Mrs Brown informed members of a critical recruitment issue which had resulted in cancellation of the scheduled electrical installation course. Members noted that actions taken had been notified to the Department and discussed at Education Committee, since which time a number of queries from MPs, MLAs and parents had been addressed.

Members empathised with the difficulties faced by staff and apprentices and queried exploring a number of avenues to canvas industry support, and the possibility of an increase of the pay offer for exceptional circumstances. In response to a query from Mr McKernan the Principal outlined the risks for the College from outsourcing but would review the possibility.

The Principal referred to the recently agreed increase in lecturers' salary and attempts to transform the lecturers' contract, and a forthcoming review into lecturers' pay, conditions and parity. He noted attempts to bridge the shortage of staff, which had not been successful, and cited the differential between industry and FE pay offer as the root cause.

Mrs Brown advised that the College were now recruiting on the basis of the revised salary and, if successful, could look at the potential for starting the course in January.

The Chair stressed the need to explore every avenue in addressing this issue, and requested that actions taken are revisited to enable further discussion at the GB meeting on 19 June.

40.9 Insurance Update

Mr Lavery referred to his paper outlining the current position on insurance renewal options for the FE sector.

Mr McKernan sought assurance that cyber security risk would be considered within the options and Mr Lavery confirmed that responsibility for cover would be examined as part of options in a business case.

40.10 Finance Update

In the context of the paper provided, Mr O'Loughlin highlighted receipt of the budget letter for 2023/24 on 16 April and advised the budget letter for 2024/25 had only been received and is under consideration.

Members noted the budget for 2024/25 would be discussed further under reserved business.

The Chair acknowledged the work which had been carried out to achieve the current position.

40.11 New Build Update

Mr Lavery presented his report. He highlighted receipt of additional funding since receiving a green status on the Gateway Review and noted that the Coleraine new build was on track for the scheduled handover date. Members would be offered a short tour of the new Causeway Campus, which he encouraged everyone to take up.

The Chair congratulated all involved on an outstanding job in keeping to schedule and to budget.

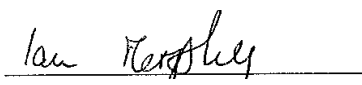
40.12 Any Other Business

The Principle advised Committee of the recent passing of the former College Chair, Ms Carmel McKinney, and extended condolences and best wishes to her family and friends on behalf of the College.

40.13 Date of Next Meeting

To be confirmed. Members noted that a draft meetings schedule for 2024/25 would be presented at GB on 19 June 2024.

The meeting ended at 5.30pm.

Mr I Murphy 

Date 14 October 2024

(Chair)

Mrs K Wallace 

(Secretary)