

## **NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE**

### **FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 1 February 2011 at the Farm Lodge Ballymena Campus.

Present                      Mrs K Collins (Chairperson), Mr T Neilands (Director),  
Mr S Davidson, Mr P McCudden.

In Attendance              Mrs C Moore and Mr J Hunter.

### **UNRESERVED BUSINESS**

#### **18.1 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Mr I Goldsworthy, Mrs L Wallis and Mr A Watt.

#### **18.2 Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interests.

#### **18.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting**

The minutes of the last meeting held on 1 December 2010 were approved.

#### **18.4 Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

#### **18.5 Chairperson's Communication**

18.5.1 Assembly Employment and Learning Committee. The Director advised Members that the Assembly Employment and Learning Committee had visited the College on 26 January 2011. He stated that as well as giving the Committee information about the College he raised the College's concerns about the DEL budget proposals..

#### **18.6 Correspondence**

The Committee received the following correspondence:

a) A letter from the Divisional Planning Office regarding the erection of a 2.4 metre security fence to the boundary of the Library Headquarters adjoining Café Lamont. It was noted that no response was required to this correspondence.

b) A Consultation Document from the Department of Justice, dated 20 January 2011, regarding a new Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland. It was noted that no response was required to this correspondence.

#### **18.7 Catering Arrangements**

The Director of Finance reminded the Committee that the Governing Body at its meeting on 6 October 2010 had agreed that the Finance & General Purposes Committee should be responsible for monitoring progress in relation to the Catering Action Plan.

The Director of Finance informed Members that satisfactory progress has been made towards achieving the targets set by Management. She stated that the Working Group had had two recent meetings and it was anticipated that a final report would be submitted to the Executive

Management Team in March 2011 and forwarded subsequently to the Finance & General Purposes Committee.

### **18.8 Monthly Management Accounts**

The Director of Finance presented the Monthly Management Accounts for the period up to 31 December 2010, which indicate that the College has a surplus of £17k on continuing operations and an historic cost surplus of £432k, which is £371k ahead of budget. The Bank Balance as at 31 December 2010 was £3.9m.

The Director of Finance advised Members that DEL grants were £633k ahead of budget due to the receipt of major works funding and a number of grants, all of which were matched by expenditure. She also indicated that staff costs were £70k less than budget primarily as a result of staff support appointments being made later than expected.

Mrs Moore stated that she expected the budget to be on target at the year-end. She said that she and the Director would meet with budget holders and line managers before half-term to discuss budgetary positions at the half-year stage.

It was noted that the College had still a number of doubtful debts, most of which were pre-merger in origin. The College was reviewing this position and a credit control officer was chasing all outstanding monies, with a focus on current debt.

### **18.9 Northern Ireland Executive's Draft Budget**

The Committee received copies of:

a) The Northern Ireland Executive's Draft Budget 2011-2015, which makes mention of the unprecedented pressure placed on the budgetary position by the difficult fiscal position. The document provides details of the proposed Departmental Budget Outcomes, including the proposed budget settlement for DEL.

b) DEL's response to the Draft Budget. The Department indicates that it faces a number of challenges over the period 2011-2015 and makes reference to: a proposed 3% efficiency savings in 2011/2012; a cessation of DEL ear-marked project funds such as the Innovation Fund; a potential further 2.7% reduction in funding in 2011/2012 and 2012/2013; and the limitation of capital funding to current contractual commitments only.

The Committee noted that CollegesNI was preparing a Sectoral response to the DEL Response, as the Department was seeking assistance from the Sector to strengthen its case. The Director advised that CollegesNI had produced a briefing note for circulation to each of the six colleges and seeking a response by mid-February 2011.

**The Director undertook to e-mail the NRC response to Members for comment prior to submission to CollegesNI.**

### **18.10 Revised Equality Scheme/Action Plan**

The Committee noted the following documents:

a) Letter from the Equality Commission dated 28 October 2010 regarding statutory duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act. The Commission has recently published a Revised Guide for Public Authorities in relation to their statutory duties under Section 75. It has requested that the College's new Equality Scheme be submitted on or before 1 August 2011, following consultation on the revised Scheme.

b) NRC paper setting out the key changes resulting from the Revised Guide and detailing the College's arrangements for fulfilling the revised Equality Scheme. The Director of Finance indicated that it had been necessary to undertake a systematic review and analysis of inequalities in order to inform the development of an action plan.

**The Committee agreed that:**

**a) The Director of Finance should circulate the proposed draft Equality Scheme and related Action Plan to Members for comment and approval by 8 February 2011; and**

**b) Subsequently the Equality Officer should progress consultation in relation the new Equality Scheme.**

### **18.11 Any Other Business**

#### 18.11.1 Fees Policy and Regulations 2011/2012

The Committee received a paper detailing the College's Fees Policy and Regulations for 2011/2012. The Director of Finance highlighted the changes to the Fees Policy and Regulations. She indicated that an increase of approximately 20% in Part-Time Fees for 2011/2012 had been proposed; the Full-Time HE Fee (rate) would be as per the DEL Circular; and the concessionary rates for tuition fees is proposed as 50% of the standard rate for the course, subject to a minimum concessionary fee of £25 per course.

A query was raised concerning fees at other comparable colleges. If fees were lower at other colleges then students could be attracted away from the NRC. The Director of Finance was requested to ascertain the fees being charged by other colleges. **The Committee agreed that the College should proceed with the proposed 20% increase, subject to favourable comparison with fees proposed by other colleges ( viz. NRC fees should be no more than 10% higher than comparable college fees).**

The Committee noted that the College had a Fees Payment Plan allowing fees to be collected in three payments by direct debit. 866 students had made use of the Plan during 2010/2011 resulting in a considerable administrative burden for the College. **The Committee approved, that the Payment Plan should apply when the fees for a course exceed £150.** This reflected the Committee's desire to maintain accessibility to courses, whilst balancing the College's ability to administer such schemes

During discussion a Member suggested, and **the Committee agreed, that one of the aims of the Fees Policy should be revised to read 'access to College programmes should be as wide as possible.'**

### **18.12 Next Meeting**

The Chairperson reminded the Committee that the next meeting is scheduled for Monday 28 February 2011 at the Ballymena Campus commencing at 5.30 pm.