

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 2 February 2010 at the Farm Lodge Ballymena Campus.

Present Mr P McCudden (Vice-Chairperson), Mr T Neilands (Director),
Mrs L Wallis and Mr A Watt

In Attendance Mrs C Moore and Mr J Hunter.

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

12.1 Apologies

An apology was received from Mrs K Collins, the Chairperson. In the absence of the Chairperson Mr P McCudden (Vice-Chairperson) chaired the meeting.

12.2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

12.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting held on 1 December 2009 were approved.

12.4 Matters Arising

12.4.1 Sale of Lease of Playing Fields at Larne to Larne Grammar School (minute 11.4.1)

The Director of Finance informed the Committee that the College had received a cheque for £97,200, which was being held by the College solicitors. Before releasing it to the College they need reassurance that the College is not selling land, which has already been sold. Considerable effort is still being made to gather evidence to establish that the land belongs to NRC.

She also advised the Committee that all attempts to arrange a meeting with Larne YMCA, to make arrangements for the payment of the sale of a lease of a small portion of land for £30,000, had failed. She said that a letter had been forwarded to the YMCA seeking payment in full or a commitment to meet with the Deputy Director Planning and Resources to discuss a payment plan.

12.4.2 New Skills Centre, Newtownabbey (minute 11.4.2)

The Director reported that the contractors were on target for the completion of the New Skills Centre prior to the commencement of the next academic year. He said that there had been a delay in the refurbishment of the Social area due to an issue with Northern Ireland Electricity. NIE has now commenced work on the transformer that had delayed the refurbishment; the delay in the contract is estimated to be in the region of six weeks. Arrangements have been made to minimise the time delay and costs.

Referring to the signing of the contract he informed the Committee, that the Governing Body (13 January 2010) had approved a recommendation from the Project Board that the contract should continue to be sealed 'under hand' and that a Due Diligence Report/Technical Survey be carried out in Year 5.

12.5 Chairperson's Communications

There were no Chairperson's communications

12.6 Correspondence

The Committee noted a communication from Mono Consultants Limited regarding a proposed Vodafone/O2 upgrade Service at the Ballymena BT Exchange at Trostan Avenue, in close proximity to the Trostan Avenue Campus. The proposal includes the swapping of existing Vodafone antennas for antennas that will support both O2 and Vodafone. The Director of Finance advised the Committee that when the original antenna was constructed the North East Institute had asked for clarification regarding perceived health risks. On this occasion Vodafone/O2 were not constructing a new antenna and had provided the College with detailed information regarding the project. In response to a query concerning risk from radiation at the Trostan Avenue Campus, the Director of Finance informed Members that there had been 30 scientific reviews in recent years none of which had indicated a health risk from radiation. She explained that radiation from the antennas was within European guidelines.

The Director added that the project had still not reached Planning Stage and the College would still have the opportunity to object at that stage, if it felt necessary.

12.7 Monthly Management Accounts

The Director of Finance presented the Monthly Management Accounts for the period up to 31 December 2009 indicating that the College had an historic surplus of £267k, which is £542k better than budget. The bank balance as at 31 October 2009 was £5.8 million. Back-pay resulting from the new Lecturers' contract would reduce the balance in the forthcoming Accounts.

12.8 Financial Memorandum

The Director of Finance stated that the Department had updated the Financial Memorandum to take account of new developments and new guidance. She referred Members to a paper providing comments from the Finance Managers' Committee in which Members expressed the need for the Memorandum to indicate:

- a) the timing of the budget for the incoming financial year;
- b) the main legislative requirements placed upon them and their governing bodies to ensure fair and equal treatment of their staff and students; and
- c) clarification regarding public procurement thresholds.

The Finance Managers were also of the view that it was not practical for:

- a) single tender actions to be approved by the Governing Body and the College Accounting Officer;
- b) advice to be taken from Central Procurement Directorate or a Centre of Expertise regarding single-tender contracts; and
- c) the revised Memorandum to be introduced retrospectively to take effect from 1 August 2009.

Commenting on the revised Memorandum the Director said that most of the changes were relatively minor; the major issues relating to the management of deficit budgets and negative reserves had remained unchanged.

12.9 Any Other Business

There was no further notified business to transact.

12.10 Next Meeting

The Chairperson reminded the Committee that the next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 23 February 2009 at the Ballymena Campus commencing at 5.30 pm. It was noted that the meeting would be preceded by the meeting of the Business Improvement Plan Project Board (4.30 pm) and followed by the meeting of the Staffing Committee (6.30 pm).