

## **NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE**

### **RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 09.06.2025 on Microsoft Teams at 4.00pm.

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

In Attendance: Mr D Blair, Mrs C Brown, Mr C Fairless (item 44.6), Mr M Lennox (item 44.12), Mrs C Murdoch (items 44.7 and 44.9)

Secretary: Mrs K Wallace

**44.1 Apologies** None.

**44.2 Declaration of Interests**

IM noted an interest in the leasing issue for Larne under item 12, having taken an allotment at the site on commercial terms and would take no part in decision making for this lease.

**44.3 Minutes of Last Meeting**

Document shared in advance: Draft minutes of 07.04.25

On the proposal of RMK and seconded by CMG, the draft minutes were agreed.

**44.4 Matters Arising**

Insurance Update: MH had reported that UMAL, who only provide insurance to the HE and FE sectors and cover over half of UK universities including Queens & Ulster Universities, had been awarded the tender for the NI FE sector. As a mutual company, there would be no premium tax and no broker commission fees payable by the College. Cover to commence from 01.08.25.

IM sought and received reassurance on level of cover provided.

In response to a query on excess and effect of a claim on premium, MH advised quantum of excess on previous policy and that any year there are claims affects premiums.

**Action: Excess on the UMAL policy will be checked and reported back to members.**

It was agreed to reorder the agenda to hear staff reports early.

**44.12 Estates – Leases**

Documents shared in advance: Submissions on Lamont lease; Ballymoney lease; Larne lease and appendix

ML summarised each of the lease proposals in turn and sought agreement to take forward for GB approval.

Larne: DMI requested information on work to be done to the building and any sink fund. ML noted no work imminent but more likely over coming years. No sink fund.

JT queried timing for potential community asset transfer. ML advised a degree of urgency to allow AEL to further explore possible transfer options before expiry of the current lease term.

MH outlined the strategic framework in place to support exploration of a business case in the autumn, with SIB engagement.

**Action: On the proposal of JT and seconded by DMI, the proposed lease was recommended to GB for approval.**

Ballymoney: Interest in the building was outlined with DfC having moved aside to allow NIHE time to consider purchase of the site. Members noted it was intended to move as quickly as possible on the disposal.

CMG and IM fully supported this approach.

Lamont: Members noted the information provided.

IM challenged insurance cover for conditions on the lease and the rental value. ML noted that LPS had provided the commercial valuation for the building and that MEABC would take on all operational expenses. Insurance issues would only arise were the building to be vacated and left empty.

DMI heard that rental income would come directly to the College.

IM asked for clarity on damage cover to the new building in the event of storms etc. ML advised that any concerns would be reported to the consultancy who would manage maintenance and issue a final certificate only upon completion.

**Action: On the proposal of DMI and seconded by IM, the proposed lease was recommended to GB for approval.**

ML left the meeting at 4.23pm.

#### **44.6 Business Engagement Update**

Documents shared in advance: Business Engagement Presentation

In the context of the presentation provided, CF outlined difficulties, funding challenges and delivery pressures. He noted the significant funding brought in during the current year, very good integration with curriculum and strong relationships with councils and LEPs. He highlighted the importance of sourcing baseline type funding provision.

Members congratulated CB, CF and the team. IM requested and received confirmation that plans were in place to move forward quickly in the event of late funding offers.

JT sought and received clarity on competition between Skills Focus and Skill Up projects.

CMG congratulated CF on the figures presented. In response to her query on future strategy, she noted the intention to have the 3-year College strategy run alongside the 3-year business engagement strategy. MH advised that the College strategy would proceed once confirmation of budget was received, with a half-day session for members proposed for September.

CMG asked for information on status of partnership building with MUDC and noted that the council was awaiting confirmation around rules before progressing.

MH noted the increased level of business engagement. He reported recently advised government interest in new funding initiatives, with workshops to take place over the summer period. Programmes would be put forward for the College and across the sector.

CF left the meeting at 4.45pm.

## 44.9 HR Paper and Appendix

Documents shared in advance: HR Report and Appendix – draft action plan

CM took Committee through her report and highlighted key points including recruitment, with upcoming recruitment exercises direct replacements for those leaving; learning and development; mandatory training and appraisals; and employee wellbeing. She thanked JT and DMI for supporting the women in leadership event and noted opportunities for involvement in upcoming panel discussions.

In relation to pay awards, CM noted increased rates and attached conditions, along with her involvement on actions alongside CB.

DMI sought information on comparison of staff resignations this year to previous based on exit interviews. On learning that these were done based on equality only, she suggested that fuller interviews be carried out going forward.

**Action: CM would review expanding the exit interview process subject to relevant sensitivities.**

DMI asked for clarification on the change in grade for the accountant position, the reason for same and how this compares across the sector. DB advised a wide variance in grading across the sector, with re-evaluation of the post based on uptake of additional responsibility and because of recent recruitment difficulties.

In response to DMI's further queries on numbers, DB confirmed that, due to pressure in the finance function and with Department support, there would be 2 permanent accountant posts alongside himself as Head of Finance. RMK asked for information on any conditions attached to the pay deal. CM referred to the attached appendix which would form the basis of a business case to progress to the Minister.

MH confirmed that conditions of offer had been accepted by TUs and members and that the business case on parity would be taken forward by SIB. He informed members that the Department were now seeking to progress transformation and Department and college groups would be set up over the summer to take forward.

JT congratulated CM on the recent women's event. She asked for further detail in relation to cause of academic staff absence and whether workload was the trigger. CM advised the main cause as inter-personal issues, with the absence rate now reduced due to the return of 3 individuals and 3 issues partly completed. She confirmed that workload was not an issue.

CMG offered her support in future panel events. She queried the status of industrial relations training and CM confirmed that sessions would be held in the new academic year, with priority on training all line managers.

MH asked for an update on progress with standardisation of lecturer duties. CB referred to the appendix action plan provided and outlined the draft common role descriptor recently presented to the T&F group, for adoption in September 2025 if all agreed. She reported that TU side were satisfied that management side was showing a clear commitment to moving forward.

IM noted his concern at percentage completion rate for cyber security training and queried the status in other colleges for this and appraisal rates. CM noted that all colleges struggle with these issues. Most had similar rates except for one college who had adopted a different approach to timing of applications, which the College was currently looking at.

IM was content with this approach. He also endorsed DMI's point on exit interviews.

#### **44.7 Pay Settlement for Lecturers**

Document shared in advance: June '25 Lecturers' Pay Award Paper

Committee noted this document the contents of which had been debated in the earlier HR agenda item.

CM left the meeting at 5.16pm

#### **44.5 Chair's Communications / Correspondence**

Documents shared in advance: IA Key Financial Controls report; DfE letter 17.04.25 on Charitable Status; Budget letters for Capital and Resource; DfE Project Governance Arrangements 15.05.25; DfE Major Capital Project Delivery – Social License Reporting 29.05.25

In the context of the internal audit report, CMG queried sharing of information on financial procedures with Committee. MH outlined the annual procedure, based on legislative requirements, with accounts direction submitted to A&R annually and used as the basis for production of the annual accounts.

**Action: An update on accounts direction would be provided to Committee for information once complete.**

CMG questioned internal audit work on management oversight and frequency of financial control audits and noted the need for more assurance in future. DB responded on the significant amount of work carried out by internal audit on the biennial Key Financial Controls report. MH noted the upcoming end to the current sector IA contract, with procurement recommendation to be provided soon. He noted the cycle of standard items for audit and the ability to request additional audits based on red risks.

DMI challenged difficulties in reconciling Department and College accounts. DB explained difference in treatment by the two bodies, failure to carry out upgrades due to resourcing issues and current focus on upgrading processes.

In relation to a question from DMI on interaction with SERC staff, DB confirmed good relationships with SERC and with the BMC Finance Manager, who had also provided support. He noted the challenge for staff of changing processes over the coming months.

MH outlined the basis for charitable status and the associated benefits. Members noted the position within the letter and the current position..

The budget letters were noted and would be reported on under the finance update.

The documents on project governance arrangements and major capital project delivery were noted.

#### **44.8 CDP Progress Report**

Documents shared in advance: CDP Progress Report Executive Summary; Draft 2025-26 CDP

MH referred members to the executive summary which had also been presented to GB on 28.05.25. Feedback from the Department was awaited and would be updated and shared with GB and committees when received.

#### **44.10 Financial Update**

Documents shared in advance: June Monitoring Bids – Impacts; Finance Update June 2025; Members' Update on DfE Reporting Pack

DB reported that June monitoring bids had been submitted in line with pressures identified by the sector, with a significant amount of narrative provided in response to queries from the Department.

Referring to the finance update, he noted confirmation of capital and revenue funding. No pressures had been flagged at this point but would be kept under review, with similar positions across the sector.

DB took members through the details of the update on the reporting pack and outlined engagement with SERC Head of Finance and good relationships with DfE. It was hoped to finalise the pack by 10.06.25 mid-day with a caveat on continued working on small, immaterial changes. He noted NIAO's pause on July '24 accounts with likely date for recommencement in July.

IM acknowledged A&R interest in this issue and encouraged focusing all resources to meet deadlines with quality information. He also emphasised importance on lessons learnt being used to become more efficient.

CMG asked for clarification on the College's contribution to the Department not meeting their accounts deadline, as referred to by the Permanent Secretary. DB confirmed that the majority of consolidation work issues were attributable to the College and expected to be named in the Department accounts.

DMI sought further information on the 'Planner' budgeting module and why it had not been implemented earlier in the switching process. DB advised use of the Agresso system by most colleges and outlined the degree of work required to change to the new system, which it was hoped to implement over the summer period.

MH reported on actions undertaken to move ahead in accordance with the Department timeline and noted the College position at this point. SERC would be utilised to check quality assurance, help with the July figures and provide training for staff which would incorporate development of detailed process information. He clarified the need for an additional accountant and advised progress on the independent review into accounts production. He also acknowledged the importance of the 'Planner' system to ensure efficiency of information processing.

RMK left the meeting at 5.35pm.

#### **44.11 New Build Update**

Documents shared in advance: CPSG Briefing Report 20.05.25

MH summarised the report, which had also been presented to the GB on 28.05.25 and invited governors to a tour of the new Ballymena building, prior to the GB meeting on 25.06.25. He noted an excellent Gateway report, with the College on track to open the building to staff in August.

JT extended Committee's congratulations to Heron Bros Ltd and McAdams for their work with the College to create and deliver social value, which had been acknowledged by being shortlisted as a finalist in the UK Government Go Awards.


CMG endorsed the above congratulations and asked that any materials left over from the changeover be recycled where possible. MH outlined processes for salvage by contractor and recirculation of materials to other campuses, along with issues related to liability as a public body. He would, however, look at all options and take best advice.

IM agreed with this process and asked that Heron Bros be made aware of this course of action.

**44.13 Any Other Business** None.

**44.14 Date of Next Meeting** To be confirmed.

The meeting ended at 6.00pm.

Mr I Murphy, Chair 

Date 15.10.25

Mrs K Wallace, Secretary 