

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Resources Committee (unreserved business) held on 11 January 2021 on Microsoft Teams, commencing at 5.00pm.

Present: Ms Y Mallon, Mrs G McConnell, Mr I Murphy (Chair), Prof T Scott and Mr G Wilkinson

In Attendance: Mrs C Brown, Dr H Dixon, Mr C Fairless Mr M Higgins, Mr S Laverty, Mr B McGahan, Ms J Small and Mrs K Wallace (Secretary)

24.1 Apologies

None.

24.2 Declaration of Interests

None.

24.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2020 were approved.

Proposed: Ms Mallon

Seconded: Mr Wilkinson

24.4 Matters Arising

The Chair hoped to have a Committee Vice-Chair appointed at the next meeting and asked that expressions of interest in the position be notified to himself.

24.5 Chair's Communication

The Chair was satisfied to note a low number of positive Covid-19 cases among staff and students. He also remarked on high levels of progress with College activities, which would be reported on throughout the meeting.

24.6 Correspondence

Mr Higgins advised that there were no implications at this stage for FE colleges, from the notified closure of the Public Sector Shared Services Programme.

24.7 External Engagement Strategy

Mr Fairless spoke to the strategy report and accompanying background document as presented, and outlined aims and objectives along with key issues through to 2025. He highlighted the establishment of an external working group to promote the strategy, and detailed recruitment underway to provide appropriate resource. Members noted key additions to the team in the form of a Schools Partnership & Community Education Assistant and a Strategic Partnership & Bids Manager.

Ms Small outlined proposals for business generation, which would be developed through an internal engagement forum. She clarified priority sectors for the College and identified activities of primary significance as those which would provide immediate revenue, after which employer based activities would be reviewed.

Attention was drawn to the configuration of the External Engagement Department within the Performance & Development portfolio as compared to the previous structure detailed in the background document.

The Principal advised that the strategy was a working document, with activities to date within original approvals given by Resources for the previous Strategic Improvement Plan. She advised that any major changes would be brought before Committee and updates would also be provided on progress.

Members welcomed the strategy paper noting that targets for income generating activity would be reviewed on an annual basis as part of the planning process. The timeliness of the paper in relation to responding to needs arising from the Covid situation was noted, as was the Chair's encouragement that consideration be given to the inclusion of a key accounts strategy to target uptake in digital media.

The Principal informed Committee that the document had been shared with Dr Graham, who had previously reviewed the business function. His recommendation for the establishment of an external advisory panel would be taken forward during February and Members' suggestions for panellists were sought.

5.39pm Mr Fairless left the meeting.

24.8 New Build Update

Members considered the New Build Project Board progress report to December 2020 and the presentation made to the Capital Steering Committee in November 2020. It was noted that the Project Board had agreed the contents of the report, viz:

- Approval to proceed with Coleraine contract award to Herons;
- Approval to issue tenders for Ballymena project;
- Release Ballymena tender documents; and
- Extended timelines due to Covid-19.

Mr Higgins advised that the College had secured the services of a BIM manager to model services in building and maximise anticipated savings in running costs whilst incorporating environmental savings.

ACTION: An update on resource implication savings and depreciation cost figures would be brought to the April meeting.

24.9 Shared Services

Dr Dixon took Committee through the LMS update and members noted progress to date on enrolment, finance integration and CDR reporting.

SLT members detailed work carried out to enable marking of registers and ongoing monitoring of same, along with an anticipated increase in bad debt provision as a result of late invoicing of fees due to LMS system issues. The Chair noted that an internal reallocation of funding might be required to cover same.

Members were assured that future enrolments would require payment for courses up-front and that a system of direct enrolment would also be in place for applicants for the coming academic year. A focus on student retention targets was highlighted.

Mr Higgins advised on the report mechanism for red risks arising from shared services to the Audit & Risk Committee and Governing Body, via the College Corporate Risk Register.

6.10pm Dr Dixon left the meeting.

24.10 HR Update

Committee considered the HR update to December 2020 and noted, in particular the levels and actions being taken in respect of long-term sickness. Mr Higgins highlighted that sickness metrics did not include Covid-19 figures, which were reported separately in the report and to the Department.

Members welcomed Department funding to cover staff in post, whilst noting that this had not been baselined.

Mrs Brown provided an update to numbers of appraisals completed until noon on 11 January, with a total overall completion rate of 53%, of which 58% of were full-time and associate lecturers, and 42% part time lecturers. The Chair welcomed the improvement in completed appraisals but asked that completion of full returns be prioritised. The Principal confirmed the mandatory requirement for an up to date appraisal process and outlined actions in place to achieve same.

24.11 Monthly Management Accounts

Mr Laverty presented the monthly accounts and NDPB return to November 2020, clarifying the position on variance and deficit figures, along with additional resource allocation provided by the Department. He highlighted the implications of the £500k funding provided by the Department for staffing having not been baselined.

The Chair welcomed the additional funding provided by the Department and would report a positive year-end position to the Governing Body.

Members noted information on the pay accrual agreement for lecturers being put forward to the Department by the sector.

Mr Wilkinson remarked on the financial position reflected in the Department and College year-end positions. Mr Wilkinson's requested that additional commentary be provided to extract the key outturn positions for both year-end positions.

ACTION: A composite finance paper would be provided for future meetings of Committee.

24.12 College Development Plan (CDP)

Ms Small spoke to the CDP which had been submitted to the Department on 11 December. She outlined factors impacting the red and amber risks reported and the potential for moving these forward. Members noted that the Department had commissioned a review of the sustainability of HE in FE across the sector and would review MaSN for future years.

6.40pm Mr Wilkinson left the meeting

6.43pm Mr Laverty left the meeting

The Chair indicated he was content with the proposed plans and actions, as outlined by Ms Small.

24.13 Any Other Business

None.

24.14 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held on 14 April 2021.

The meeting concluded at 6.45pm.

Mr I Murphy Ian Murphy

(Chair)

Date 14 April 2021

Mrs K Wallace K Wallace

(Secretary)