

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 14 October 2024 on Microsoft Teams commencing at 4.00 pm.

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

Apologies: Mrs J Taggart

In Attendance, College Management: Mrs C Brown, Mr S Lavery, Mr D Blair

Mr C Fairless, item 41.6

Mrs C Murdoch, Item 41.7

Acting Secretary: Mrs R Toms

41.1 Welcome and Apologies

Mr David Blair, newly appointed Head of Finance, was welcomed to the meeting.

41.2 Declaration of Interests

None.

41.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The draft minutes of the meeting on 10 June 2024 were approved.

Proposed: Mrs D McIlwaine

Seconded: Mr R McKernan

41.4 Matters Arising

AEL Lease. Mr Lavery provided an update, advising that he had been liaising with AEL and 10-year extension to the lease from 2024 had been agreed; he is currently liaising with the Legal Team and LPS to finalise.

Mrs McIlwaine enquired about other interested parties. Mr Lavery provided an update, following the meeting attended by Mr Nelson, Mr Murphy and himself, advising that their interest was in relation to alignment on curriculum delivery. Mrs Brown confirmed that a meeting is planned to explore options.

Standardisation of KPI figures in the CDP has been confirmed through DfE correspondence in relation to annual verification of data from 2025 onwards; Mr Lavery provided a summary of the plans in respect of auditing of FE Sector data.

41.5 Chair's Communications / Correspondence

Economy Minister's Sub-regional Economic Plan

Mr Murphy referred to the publication of the Minister's Sub-regional Economic Plan and provided a high-level summary of the key points within.

Mr Higgins referred to the DfE 3-Year Plan and the link to regional balance, in the context of FE Colleges, and provided an overview of the key elements within the Plan; he also referred to the Draft Programme for Government, which is currently out for consultation. Mr Higgins also advised of a recent consultation meeting with Invest NI in relation to the Invest Northern Ireland 2024-27 Business Strategy and advised that the College CDP reflects the direction of travel of all these key papers.

Mr Murphy confirmed the material will form the basis of discussions at the College Strategy Day in January.

ACTION: Share Plans and Invest NI Regional Plan with GB Members

41.6 Business Engagement Presentation

Mr Fairless, Head of Marketing and Business Engagement, was welcomed to the meeting to speak to the presentation previously shared with members. He summarised the key points in relation to overall targets and achievements for 2023/24. Summary detail on activity within particular areas, including: Skills Focus; InnovateUs; Innovation Vouchers; Fusion; Connected; Academies; Schools Partnership; and Community Education was presented. The presentation ended with a high-level summary of overheads and margins. It was noted that this would be a topic for inclusion at the Governors' Strategy Day in January 2025.

Members were invited to comment on the presentation.

Mrs McGovern thanked Mr Fairless for answering her previous queries, highlighted by email, on specific matters and requested further clarification on potential upcoming funding. Mr Fairless responded and explained the process involved when bidding for funding and the allocation process followed by DfE. Mrs McGovern noted that further clarification on overheads and margins would be welcome.

Mrs McIlwaine requested and received clarification on the costings.

Mr Higgins referred to the operating context of budget reductions and the subsequent decision to grow income to cover budget pressures; he emphasised the importance of ensuring that these streams of work are baselined within the college budget going forward, in consultation with DfE.

Mr Murphy referred to the importance of promoting skills through academies.

Mrs Brown confirmed that planning is ongoing in relation to curriculum planning for 2025/26 and agreed that greater certainty in relation to upcoming funding would be beneficial to this planning.

Mrs McIlwaine referred to the communication from DfE in relation to ensuring the stability of the headcount following the VSS process. Mr Lavery advised that it has been clarified with DfE that colleges can recruit to areas of growth in order to grow the sector.

Mr Murphy thanked Mr Fairless for his presentation and the ongoing work of his team.

41.7 HR Paper

Mrs Murdoch, Head of HR and OD, was welcomed to the meeting and invited to speak to the HR Update Paper, which was previously shared with members.

Mrs Murdoch highlighted key points, including the positive news in respect of successful recent recruitment. She referred to the Mandatory Training for staff and noted the current completion rates; she advised of the new format in relation to online induction training. Mrs Murdoch drew attention to the improved position in respect of sickness absence management.

Mrs McIlwaine requested clarification on some operational matters, including: recruitment pools, face-to-face interaction in respect of induction training; consequences of non-completion of mandatory training; sickness management training of line managers. All matters were clarified by Mrs Murdoch.

Mr McKernan referred to recruitment to difficult-to-attract areas and noted the improved position, he enquired about interaction with employers to encourage an increase in applications, as previously discussed. Mrs Murdoch provided an update and noted that the sector is working to pursue this route. Mr McKernan asserted that this would be a desirable path for the College to pursue.

Mrs Brown and Mr Lavery referred to interventions with employers to also improve application pools, such as the Construction Futures event led by the College.

Mr Higgins noted the positive reduction in sickness absence and commended Mrs Murdoch and the team on this positive outcome. Noting that the annual cycle of performance reviews is due to commence within the College, advised that line managers will be briefed in advance on those staff who have not yet complied with mandatory training.

Mr Murphy provided suggestions for ensuring that staff who continue with non-compliance with mandatory training requirements receive appropriate sanctions.

Mr Murphy thanked Mrs Murdoch for her report and contribution.

41.8 Finance Update

Mr Murphy invited Mr Blair to speak to his Finance Update paper, which was previously shared with members.

Mr Blair provided a high-level summary of the key points within the paper, along with an update on the on-going audit for 2023/24. He referred to the 3-year projections which had been submitted to DfE and previously shared with members.

Mr Lavery referred to the budget variations, as seen within Business Engagement, and the impact on the Finance Risk within the College; he referred to the bid for baselining Skills Funding, which was rejected by DfE.

Mr Lavery provided an update on the significant work being undertaken to ensure the year-end accounts up to March 2024, followed by the accounts up to July 2024 are on track, as agreed and reported to Audit & Risk and GB.

Mrs McGovern congratulated the Finance team on the work undertaken to reach this point and requested clarification on the current status of the year-end accounts and their presentation to Governors.

Mr Lavery provided a summary on the status of both sets of accounts, the College's statutory accounts planned presentation to the Audit & Risk Committee and subsequently the Governing Body in due course and the continued impact that Colleges doing two sets of accounts was having on finance teams across the FE Sector.

Mrs McGovern enquired about the possibility of Governors receiving the March year-end accounts; Mr Lavery clarified the format of the March year-end accounting pack, as requested by DfE and advised that the July year-end accounts, once completed would be a more appropriate format for members to review.

Mr Murphy requested that the March year-end accounting pack should be shared with members prior to being submitted to DfE.

Mr Higgins advised at the recent Audit & Risk Committee meeting the College provided commitments to DfE in relation to the prioritisation and completion of the accounts.

Action: Mr Lavery to arrange for Accounting Pack for March year-end to be shared with members.

41.9 New Build Update

Mr Murphy invited Mr Lavery to speak to the New Build Update paper. Mr Lavery provided an overview of the position in respect of moving towards completion of the Ballymena Campus

as planned for September 2025; he noted the success of the recent official opening of Causeway Campus.

Mr Murphy referred to the upcoming monitoring round and the opportunity to prepare associated bids.

Mr McKernan enquired about the snag list in respect of defects in the new build; Mr Lavery advised of the status of this, which will be on-going with the Contractor for 12 months post-completion.

41.10 CDP Submission

Mr Higgins addressed the recent submission of the updated draft CDP, as submitted to DfE on 11 October 2024 and referred to the minor changes which were made to the initial draft, following DfE feedback. All related documents were shared with the members.

Mr Higgins referred to specific key points, including the comparisons within the CDP and the impact of VSS on the figures; he referred to the Educational Report Card, submitted in conjunction with the CDP, and noted the key points in relation to targets and baselines agreed with DfE. Attention was drawn to the change in reporting, whereby we now report on unique individuals registered in the college. Retention and achievement figures were noted.

Mr Murphy commended the work undertaken in preparing the CDP and noted that this will be a key focus at the Governors' Strategy Day on 22 January 2025.

Mrs McIlwaine referred to the format of the letter from DfE; Mr Higgins clarified the position.

41.11 Any Other Business

Mr Murphy noted that Mrs Murdoch is progressing plans for members' training.

Mr Lavery provided an update on the position within the sector in relation to Insurance and referred to a potential option for self-insurance; he advised that a budget increase to cover insurance premium for 24/25 has been secured until alternative options are considered.

41.12 Date of Next Meeting

27 January 2025.

The meeting ended at 5.40 pm.

Mr I Murphy

lan Hensley

Date 27 January 2025

(Chair)

Mrs R Toms

R Toms

(Secretary)