

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 22 January 2024 on Microsoft Teams commencing at 4.00pm.

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

In Attendance: Mr C Fairless, Ms D Kearney, Mr S Lavery, Mrs C Murdoch, Ms J Small
Mrs K Wallace (Secretary)

38.1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed Ms Kearney, acting Head of Finance, to the meeting.

Apologies were received for Mrs Taggart and Mr Higgins.

38.2 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest.

38.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The draft minutes of the following meetings were approved:

- 12 June 2003 Proposed: Ms D McIlwaine Seconded: Mr McKernan
- 12 October 2023 Proposed: Mrs C McGovern Seconded: Mr McKernan

38.4 Matters Arising

None.

38.5 Chair's Communications / Correspondence

Members noted an update to the Committee membership in the Terms of Reference.

Members noted confirmation of additional capital and revenue budget allocation for 2023/24.

In response to a question from the Chair, Mr Lavery outlined capital budget income during the year and advised that all additional monies would be used for procurements of IT or furniture through existing frameworks/agreements. In relation to any further offer of funding for new builds, Mr Lavery reported that the New Build Project Director and team would confirm the maximum which could be utilised within the current financial ear.

In response to queries from Mrs McGovern, Mr Lavery clarified areas of work which fall within the minor works and new build categories of funding linked back to business case approvals.

The Chair outlined the contents of the Budget Allocation update. Mr Lavery confirmed the money would be used to cover previously reported pressure of £675k (November Actuals) with extra money for cost of living support for students to end of March 2024.

The Chair anticipated a further meeting of Committee in March to consider the progress of the VES and the impact on the coming year's budget.

38.6 HR Update

Ms Murdoch spoke to her report and highlighted a number of issues including:

- recruitment, with a recruitment event to be held on 21 February in Farm Lodge campus, supported by advertising on social media and in trade specific magazines.
- VES which opened on 17 November, with 90 expressions of interest received to date. Applications would close on 26 January with offers to relevant staff on 9 February.
- Health and Wellbeing. Members extended congratulations to the Student Services Team on their award for Volunteering team of the Year and congratulated Ms Murdoch for increased participation in Health and Wellbeing activities.
- In response to a query from Mr McKernan, Ms Murdoch confirmed that although sickness absence figures had been increasing over the last 5 years, those for 2022/23 were particularly high and had been impacted by Covid. Recent monthly reports, however, suggested a lessening of the upward trend.

Mr Lavery anticipated that some staff currently on sickness absence would apply for VES. In response to a query from Ms McIlwaine, Ms Murdoch clarified that staff with a previously identified exit date could not avail of VES. In a response to a query from Mr McKernan on quarterly absence figures, Ms Murdoch advised the information across the sector was not available quarterly at present, but Colleges would work to increase sector reporting within the available resources.

Mrs McGovern queried cover for staff during sickness absence and impact on student performance. Ms Murdoch confirmed arrangements for cover but noted that impact on performance was not currently monitored. Mrs McGovern suggested that impact on performance should be monitored if sickness absence numbers continue to increase, to assess whether further cover is required.

The Chair advised that more information on impact from the VES should be known by the end of the month.

Mr Lavery highlighted the up-coming Staff Awards celebration on 26 January and thanked Ms Murdoch for her report and she left the meeting at 4.36pm.

It was agreed to take the external engagement item next in the meeting.

38.10 External Engagement / Business Development

Mr Fairless took members through his report. He highlighted projected external funding for 2023/24, targets for 2024/25, changes in funding allocation, and risk around Government funded partnerships for 2024/25. Members regrettably noted that the Skill Up programme would end in March 2024.

In response to a question from Mrs McGovern, Ms Small outlined the current costing model applied across the College. She advised that increased integration of College systems would allow more in-depth information and was a priority for going forward. She congratulated Mr Fairless and the team for work carried out on achieving circa £2.5m additional funding for the College. Ms Small also noted that the increase in staff for this section had been developed strategically in parallel with the strategic plan.

The Chair thanked Mr Fairless for his report and was pleased at the level of funding achieved.

4.56pm Mr Fairless left the meeting.

38.7 New Build Update

Committee considered the report of the Project Board meeting on 9 January 2024. Mr Lavery noted the possibility of a little slippage into April on the Coleraine build, which was on track for opening to students in September. He advised that the Coleraine project would have to undergo an assessment, which it was hoped would take the form of a Gateway review.

The Chair reported a very good meeting of the Project Board in January. He confirmed that the Coleraine build was looking very good. He reported additional technical expertise to be brought on board for the Ballymena build where a more complex encamp was anticipated.

Mr Lavery reported that an SRC resource was currently being used to cover the Sector-wide Building Information Modelling (BIM) project role that was previously undertaken by NRC, with the now vacant post currently being advertised. He advised that significant work was being done via the New Build and Encamp teams.

38.8 Finance Update

The finance update was taken as read. Mr Lavery advised no information forthcoming on the budget for 2024/25, with the key issue being the position with the NI Executive. Members heard that, as a result, none of the colleges were currently doing any scenario planning.

The Chair expected more information to be available on both the budget and VES position for the March meeting. He emphasised the need for engagement with politicians on the FE position going forward.

The report was noted.

5.05pm Ms McIlwaine left the meeting.

38.9 IT Update

Consideration was given to the IT update. Mr Lavery highlighted the main themes of the report including work done to move towards cyber accreditation, technical input to the new build projects and major improvements to existing IT systems, with the patching rate the highest in the sector.

The Chair emphasised the importance of everyone completing essential cyber training and would return to this issue in March when Mr Ross would attend the meeting.

38.11 Any Other Business

Mrs McGovern queried any information re the consultancy return schedule in the annual workplan contained in the Terms of Reference. Mr Lavery advised very infrequent use of consultants by the College, with a managed service used where required.


In response a question by Mrs McGovern on whether pay increases were guaranteed, Mr Lavery explained the business case and approval process used for academic staff. The budget availability from April 2024 was the key issue.

The Chair noted that a contractual pay rise was given to non-academic employees.

38.12 Date of Next Meeting

Date in March to be confirmed.

The meeting concluded at 5.18pm.

Mr I Murphy 

Date 8 April 2024

(Chair)

Mrs K Wallace 

(Secretary)