

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STAFFING COMMITTEE OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF SOUTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE HELD ON TUESDAY 6 OCTOBER 2020 AT 17.30 VIA TELECONFERENCE.

PRESENT:

Mr Scott Alexander, Chair
Mr Brian Doran, Chief Executive
Mr Gordon Gough
Mr John Nugent
Dr Eileen Stewart

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr Andrew Saunders, Governing Body Chair
Mr Raymond Sloan, Director of Client Services
Mrs Ann Marie Hughes, Assistant Director Human Resources and Development
Mrs Petra McGuirk, Human Resources and Development
Mrs Helen O'Connor, Human Resources and Development
Miss Lindsay Armstrong, Secretary to the Governing Body

The meeting convened at 17.32.

Mrs Hughes requested Committee Members' agreement for Mrs McGuirk and Mrs O'Connor to observe the meeting and explained that they have provided substantial contribution to the papers presented to the Committee. The request was unanimously granted.

A01. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the Boardroom Apprentice, Mr McGuigan.

A02. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair reminded those present to declare at the start of the meeting any conflicts with regard to matters to be discussed. No interests were declared.

Mr Sloan arrived at the meeting at 17.35.

A03. MINUTES OF THE MEETING 5 MAY 2020

The Chair referred Members to the minutes of the meeting of 5 May 2020. The minutes were reviewed for accuracy and subsequently approved on the proposal of Mr Gough and seconded by Mr Nugent.

A04. MATTERS ARISING

It was noted that matters arising will be addressed throughout the meeting.

A05. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

Mr Alexander welcomed Mrs McGuirk and Mrs O'Connor to the meeting.

A06. STAFFING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

Members reviewed the Staffing Committee Annual Report and Self-Assessment for the 2019-2020 academic year detailing membership, attendance and self-assessment outcomes.

**ACTION
by whom**

Members noted comments arising from the self-assessment questionnaires remarking that the Staffing Committee is tightly-knit and well run, and achieves its remit and lends professional support to the Executive Team providing a high level of oversight, matters of debate and good governance.

Discussion took place regarding Members' responsibility under TOR 10 to monitor the appraisal process operating across all areas of the College. Members were informed of the two schemes in operation and were advised on the process of personal engagement between the appraisee and their line manager. Members recommended that additional granular information regarding the appraisal process be provided to the Committee going forward. Management committed to look at the capture of information and presentation of such to the Committee.

The report noted that Members did not identify any training needs, though one comment highlighted that given that the staffing and human resources sector is a dynamic and ever-changing environment, any relevant training as identified by management would be greatly appreciated.

The Annual Report concluded that the Committee is well chaired and agreed the quick delivery of minutes and actions points raised.

The Annual Report was approved on the proposal of Mr Nugent and seconded by Mr Gough subject to a rewording concerning TOR 10 on page 3.

A07. STAFFING COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

Member reviewed their Terms of Reference and agreed they remained appropriate.

Dr Stewart recommended the addition of a further reference to specify Members' responsibility to review and approve locally developed policies presented to the Staffing Committee.

Members concurred. The Terms of Reference were approved on the proposal of Dr Stewart and seconded by Mr Gough, subject to approval of the additional statement.

A08. KPI ANNUAL REPORT

Mrs Hughes presented the Human Resources Performance Indicator Report for the academic year 2019-2020. Members noted a slight decline in overall staff numbers, and reviewed gender and religious comparison data. Mrs Hughes stated that she did not necessarily expect any changes to the data as a result of remote working. Members were notified that the three yearly submission of the Article 55 Equality Commission report is approaching. In response to a query raised by Mr Gough, the Committee was advised that no issues regarding religious diversity have been raised through equality monitoring reporting.

Mrs Hughes informed of recruitment exercises to 112 posts during the academic year and advised that adjustments to online interview means has proved successful.

Members noted that staff turnover is comparable to previous years and were advised on four new or revised mandatory training programmes released during the period. Mrs Hughes informed on the development of a new online training programme on manual handling and the modification of three existing mandatory training programmes to be issued to staff in the current academic year.

Mrs Hughes

Committee
Members

Mrs Hughes presented granular information with regard to sickness absence and advised that combined staff averaged 2.36% or 6.17 average days absent in the 2019-2020 academic year. Members noted that SRC ranks top of the sector in absence management with a comparison sector benchmark of 3.25% or 8.17 average days absent. Members remarked on the downward trajectory, commenting that sickness absence appears to be well managed. Mrs Hughes referred the Committee to the absence analysis of reported symptoms and days lost. Members noted that personal stress and work-related stress contributes as the greatest reason for sickness absence over the period. Mrs Hughes advised on interventions in place including early engagement, to reduce work-related stress and resulting in a decline of 27.8% since last year.

Member noted the unique circumstances imposed by the current health crisis, that fact that many members of staff are working remotely and require flexibility in their work pattern due to caring and other responsibilities. The Committee considered it inappropriate to make any revisions to the sickness target at the current time therefore retaining it 3.5% for the 2020-21 academic year.

Members reviewed annual data on staff grievances, staff discipline, formal counselling, harassment and capability cases. Mrs Hughes informed that total staff contracts as at 31 August 2020 is 1125.

Members thanked Mrs Hughes and her team for the good work done under difficult circumstances. Mr Sloan acknowledged the various measures made to adapt working arrangements and thanked Mrs Hughes, Mrs McGuirk and Mrs O'Connor for their assistance throughout.

The Committee noted the report.

A09. S75 ANNUAL PROGRES REPORT (1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020)

Mrs Hughes presented the S75 Annual Statutory Equality Progress Report for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 providing examples of key policy and service delivery developments undertaken to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

Members welcomed the comprehensive report, noting that many challenges that will be presented in next year's report as a consequence of social distancing. The Committee recommended that a summary sheet identifying key activities be provided going forward.

Mrs Hughes

The Committee noted that 3 actions have been completed and 5 are ongoing within section 1 of the Plan and reviewed achievement of Part B objectives and activities that have been undertaken to address disability plans.

Discussion took place regarding staffs' response to the current health pandemic, the requirement of social distancing and the challenges that have arisen. Members acknowledged the positive feedback concerning colleagues' demonstrated adaptability and resilience, and recognised the need for a continued flexible attitude and good engagement. Committee Members commended staff and College management for adopting a balanced approach to ensure delivery of the many business functions, and commented on a good report.

The document was approved on the proposal of Mr Gough and seconded by Mr Nugent.

Mrs O'Connor left the meeting at 18.30

A10. CAREER BREAK REQUESTS

Mrs Hughes informed of one application to an extension of a career break and advised that the request falls outside the parameters of the scheme. She informed the Committee of the individual's extenuating circumstances, the provision of cover in place and stated that HRD are minded to support the staff member's career break request on the basis of the potential for associated disability discrimination.

Mr Alexander referred to the provision of associated disability discrimination and protection in law. Having considered the mitigating factors, Members agreed to approve the request on the proposal of Mr Gough and seconded by Dr Stewart.

A11. POLICIES

- **Promotions, Responsibility Allowances and Staff Recognition Scheme Payments**

Mrs Hughes presented the paper entitled payments to permanent and temporary promotions, responsibility allowances and the annual staff recognition scheme and advised Members that under the current scheme it is not possible to treat all award recipients equably as certain donated gifts have been valued higher than others. She stated that due to Covid-19, it has not been appropriate to contact College suppliers with a request to donate prizes as some companies have been in lockdown and may be facing potential financial insecurity.

Mr Hughes advised that it is management's recommendation going forward to award a monetary amount of £500 as recognition in the form of a taxable, non-pensionable, lump sum payment.

Mrs Hughes confirmed that the proposal is based on the Civil Service scheme and supplied detail on associated proposed costs.

A detailed discussion took place. Dr Stewart advised that although she is not opposed to a reward recognition scheme, she has personal experience of negativity in the workplace arising as a detriment of conducting award schemes. Members concurred it inappropriate to solicit goods from College suppliers and expressed concern over the potential for greater resentment and the perception of a conflict of interest to arise.

Mr Gough expressed reservation, explaining that gifting monetary payment to staff as a means of reward recognition during times of budgetary restraint may not be well received within and outside the organisation.

The proposal was declined. Members recommended that Departmental opinion on the scheme be sought, and if favourable, the proposal then issued to staff for consultation.

A12. IIP & HEALTH & WELLBEING

- **IIP Annual Report 2019-2020**
- **Summary of HWB activities 2019-2020**
- **HWB Calendar of events 2020-2021**

Mrs Hughes presented the Investors in People (IIP) Continuous Action Plan and informed Members that the College's nominated IIP assessor recommends the areas of high priority to address within the Plan as:

- Leading and inspiring people;
- Managing performance;
- Reward and recognition, and;
- Health and Wellbeing.

Mrs Hughes referred Members to the agreed actions and progress to date. She advised on the action to help staff understand the whole performance management strategy, and communicate management and staff set objectives across the organisation. Members noted various actions postponed as an impact of Covid-19, and reviewed the summary of health and wellbeing activities focusing on physical, psychological and social welfare.

The Committee noted the reports and planned monthly events for the 2020/2021 academic year.

A13. SUMMARY OF ED ACTIVITIES 2019-2020

Mrs Hughes referred the Committee to scheduled charity events in 2020/2021, advised that the College's nominated charity is Air Ambulance NI and informed that the College has so far raised £3,655 against a target of £10k.

Members noted the report.

A14. EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2020-2021

Mrs Hughes presented the Employee Development Plan and referred Members to the six key areas; general (all staff), pedagogy, support staff, management & leadership, health & safety and health & wellbeing.

Mrs Hughes referred to Members' prior recommendation to make enquiries regarding to accessing the IOSH safety training online and advised that now viable numbers have been identified and the new Health & Safety Manager is in post, progress will be made in this regard with Walter Marks. Mr Nugent urged management to explore options to progress the training elsewhere, if necessary.

Mrs Hughes advised that further refinement will be made to the plan to include software training and minute taking. Mr Alexander commented on the need to be flexible and accommodating particularly in consideration of those who may contract coronavirus and require a long period of recovery.

The Committee noted the report.

A15. CEF CIRCULARS – None

- **Departmental approval to pay increments for Lecturing staff September 2020**

Mrs Hughes referred the Committee to the Departmental letter dated 15 July and advised that payment of the incremental progression pay has been processed.

A16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mrs Hughes informed that the College is participating in a national fraud initiative and advised that the data lift will commence in the next few weeks.

A17. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Staffing Committee will take place on Tuesday 2 March 2021 at 18.30 in the Banbridge Campus.

The meeting concluded at 19.23.

Mrs Hughes

CHAIR

DATE

