**MINUTES OF THE F&GP COMMITTEE**

**HELD ON 23 FEBRUARY 2021 AT 10.30AM**

**BY ZOOM**

**Present:** K Smith (Chair), S Lambe (SL), E Loughridge (EL), S McElhinney (SMcE)

**In attendance**: S Gallaher (CEO), G Devlin (SEO), M Matthews (F&CM), S Gondhia (TFA), L Dickson (PA)

**1. Apologies: C McBride**

The Chair noted apologies from CMcB and expressed the Committees wishes for her speedy recovery.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the last meeting and

4. Matters Arising

AB indicated that he had some amendments to the minutes of the last meeting and would send them on to the PA for noting.

SMcE asked if there had been any agreement if names, initials or anonymization were to be used in the minutes as the public needs to be aware of proposals and accountability. SL added that she thought that initial were to be used. The CEO advised that a form of minutes were agreed at the Council meeting and that was that they should be prepared under Cabinet Office Guidelines and anonymized as far as possible. He said a salient decision needs to be made and can use initials if requested. SMcE said openness and trust is needed. She suggested that the minutes could not be approved until initials are used, AB’s additions added and adjustments made for the next meeting.

Proposed: SMcE

Seconded: SL

The CEO said that where the minutes stated ‘A Member’ then this should be changed to the members initials. The PA to go back to the original notes and add initials.

AB indicated that he had just sent the amendments to the PA and it was agreed by all members that the minutes would be left until the amendments were made.

**5. Finance Report**

The F&CM provided an update on the Finance Report at 31 January, highlighting the annual DE resource allocation budget of £1.2 million, and expenditure and easements. Members were advised that income was down £52,000 because of the effect of Covid on substitute teacher fees combined with a small shortfall on interest due to poor market interest rates. She highlighted that there had been some savings on premises costs because staff were not in the office; on regulation costs due to the legislative difficulties and in Internal Audit spend.

The Chair enquired if there was a risk of losing that underspend money. The F&CM explained how this worked within the DE budget and that we do not lose any cash from the organization.

The F&CM indicated that work has progressed on the 2019/2020 Annual Report and Accounts and would expect that this would be finished within the next few weeks.

Work on internal audit has taken place over the last few months. She advised that GTCNI has received an unacceptable assurance rating for this year as the Auditors were not satisfied with elements of the Business Continuity and the Disaster Recovery Plans. Specifically internal audit would have liked to have seen further testing of the Plan and a testing schedule contained within the Plan. She advised that the Registration system is still going through an upgrade and that internal audit have been given assurances that when it goes live testing will be scheduled. The F&CM said that the Plan is presented to F&GP today subject to their satisfaction with its content for sign off.

**6. Procurements and Contracts Register**

The F&CM referred to the procurement and contracts register and highlighted to members the contracts which the Council holds. She advised that there was no significant changes to the register to report.

SL asked that in regards to the previous audit being unacceptable, if the previous recommendations were not enough. The F&CM explained the levels of acceptance and said that we had not made enough significant progress.

SMcE enquired if the recommendations we were asked are reasonable and asked if there was any way to move our assurance to ‘limited’. The F&CM indicated that the organization had limited resources and has a lot to comply with for a small organization. She advised that the biggest risk is resourcing and that the audit recommendations are not unreasonable.

SMcE discussed that GTCNI must be one of the smallest organisations but still have to follow the same procedures as larger organisations. She asked that it be noted that employees are working very hard to meet the core business needs.

The Chair enquired about contract extension periods and asked if these are written in and the F&CM clarified that this is something that is considered as part of the initial procurement.

The CEO informed members that contracts could be placed with the option to extend and that recommendations to extend are made to Council. The Chair enquired about the Headstogether contract and the associated expenditure. The CEO indicted that it was the intention to go to tender during the next year. SMcE informed members that Alison Chambers is to remind Council when this is to go out to tender. The CEO advised that reasons were needed on why not to extend a contract and that 3 month is needed for a tender period. SMcE indicated that AC had alluded that the Council were out of time. The CEO indicted that AC had advised that the Council would not have had enough time to go to contract. The F&CM enquired from AB if a Post Project Evaluation was needed prior to extending and AB is to check. The F&CM also advised that extension periods will be provided for in the Business Cases. The Chair enquired if there could be gaps between contracts and the F&CM said this was not advisable.

Members discussed extension periods for contracts. The Chair asked if it would be an idea to extend the HTG contract for 6 months and go to tender. The CEO said that there is work ongoing with them and asked for reasons for this. The Chair said there were satisfaction issues which had been discussed within committees. The CEO said that because of ongoing work he would advocate working at least up to December and then go for a new provider.

SMcE asked regarding good governance what proportion of our budget is spend on HR in comparison with other NDPBs. AB advised he was not aware of other NDPBs budgets but that GTCNI is in a different position to others. SMcE advised that the Council needs HR advisors and asked if there is an issue in getting the business case up and running. The CEO advised that the HR Committee had agreed that the Contract would continue and would look at it in good time for tendering. The spend on HR is significantly more than it should be. The CEO discussed the pros and cons of having an HR person on staff and said this needs consideration

SL enquired when this should start and the CEO said that the process would need to be initiated no later than the next quarter. The F&CM advised that she had prepared a business case for the last HR procurement and this would not change substantially and tender documents had also been prepared. She advised that GTCNI had no control over the Department’s approval timeline and the main issue is the post project evaluation. She indicated that 6 months would be plenty of time.

The CEO said it would be prudent to allow 3 months for DE to turn around business cases. SMcE provided the Committee with timescales discussed at the HR Committee regarding HTC and SL enquired if the Committee knew the Business case was ready to go. SMcE said the committee did not know and were concerned about gaps with providers and money spent. The CEO said the figures quoted would equate to a post and the expenditure on the contract is significant and the use of HR is more than anticipated. SMcE noted concerns over the expenditure of £48,000 to date and was glad to note that this was not as big a task as first thought. She thanked the F&CM for her information.

The F&CM continued with her report and highlighted the amount of Business Cases – replacement IT System, Corporate Legal Services, Accommodation, Pay remit and Internal Audit Services and advised that all with the exception of IT Replacement System have been approved.

The F&CM directed members to the section on cash balances at end January 2021, indicating that these had been spread over reputable institutions and pointed out that we do not have reserves to cover liabilities at present.

The Chair noted the potential shortfall on reserves of £151,000 and the F&CM broke this down for members for information.

**7. Registration System Project**

The CEO updated members on progress, advising that the Business Case had been submitted informally to DE pending discussion at Council. It was noted that the Chair had submitted a Motion to the Chair of Council but this will be discussed separately on the agenda. Members were updated on the procurement of the Project Manager which is now with CPD to finalize. It is hoped this appointment will be in place by end March. Work will then start on ITT with a revised procurement works request to CPD. This work cannot begin until the Business Case is approved. It was hoped to disengage with current supplier by March 2022 but this now looks unlikely. Members discussed the DAC of 1+1. The CEO advised that work is progressing on the upgrade system and GTCS is providing support. The SEO advised security clearance had been obtained for the 2 individuals working on this.

The Chair enquired about the progress of the informally submitted Business Case and AB advised that there had been no feedback yet and analysis is ongoing. He was unsure if there would be any information in time for the Council meeting. The CEO indicated that the case would also have to go to DOF by formal submission.

**8. Business Planning 2020/21**

The CEO advised a session had been completed in November 2020 and on the back of that a Committee member did not feel they could approve the Business Plan. The Plan was referred back to F&GP for their consideration. The CEO asked if the Committee could approve the 2020/21 Business Plan and invited discussion. EL indicated that she was absent from the Committee in November and would go with the rest of the Committee. The CEO took members through the document, highlighting workstreams including Learning Leaders, the completion of accreditation of BA programmes and the partial completion of the HR action plan.

SL asked for clarity and progress on the NIPSA Survey. The CEO said that he had engaged with NIPSA and received no response. The F&CM advised that the NIPSA rep had suffered a bereavement but the CEO advised that the correspondence dates back several months and that the Joint Recognition Agreement was never enacted. He said that NIPSA had been given dates prior to Christmas but no response was ever received.

The CEO advised that absence rates had vastly improved this year. He updated members on registration, the registration upgrade, Corporate Plan and Information Governance and asked members if they were happy to adopt the plan.

SMcE enquired if all business cases were prepared and the CEO said that operating within the MSFM as far as he was aware they were. The F&CM agreed. SMcE highlighted the good work being done by the Council and said there were some issues pending. The CEO advised members that the descriptors to the Plan were provided by DE. In answer to a question from SL the CEO explained the VES system and temporary staffing, adding that there was one temporary member of staff on a 9 month contract. SL asked about the Council Effectiveness Review and the CEO discussed the number of elements involved including the review and agreement of ToRs, appraisal of DE nominations and appraisal of Council members. He advised that a paper had been prepared for the December Council meeting but not discussed. He indicated he would send a form to Committee members to give views on their Committee. The CEO advised the need to record that the plan has been adopted as per the recommendation of Council in October.

Proposed: SL

Seconded: SMcE with the proviso that these be reviewed and adjustments made.

The CEO indicated the next update would be completed by the end of the year and explained the DE assessment process. He added that some workstreams would be completed but others would not. SMcE voiced concerns at the delay and said if everyone is happy enough she would second but asked that concerns were noted.

**9. Business Plan 2021/22**

The CEO asked for adoption to bring forward to Council and highlighted the important workstreams to be progressed. AB provided details of the Oversight Group and the intention to go out to consultation on Learning Leaders. He said that a key area has been a widespread mentoring programme for teachers and work on the teaching competences has been a key driver. The CEO indicated that an audit would need to be taken of recognition of qualifications for registered teachers. The SEO detailed the current process for dealing with qualifications in NI and emphasized this is a substantial piece of work.

The CEO discussed the adoption of the handbook, staff performance and appraisal scheme and the requirement of a Senior Communications person to develop a strategy and plan. He advised of work which is to be carried out including accommodation, information management and governance and the Equality and Disability Action plan.

The Chair requested that accommodation be added to the agenda for the next meeting. The CEO discussed remote working and to what effect it would have on accommodation. SL enquired about timeframe and the CEO said it could be looked at next quarter and a conversation could be opened with the landlord. The F&CM advised of her contact with the landlord who is open to conversation on reduced requirement and extension of lease. The CEO asked if the Committee was content for this to go forward to Council and if they were content to adopt. He asked for proposer and seconder.

Proposed: SMcE – Noting concerns stated

Seconded: SL

**10. Corporate Risk Register**

The CEO highlighted forthcoming important workstreams including information management governance and the publication scheme and indicate that a satisfactory rating will not be achieved until the work is completed. He advised that the Risk Register would be picked up at the Council Meeting and a specific session on this for members of the Committee will be planned.

SMcE advised that issues of concern needed to be noted on Corporate Risks. The CEO advised this would be discussed at ARAC also. SL requested noting concerns and asked for a date for proposed training. The CEO said that hopefully a session would be carried out in March and the Register is a standing item on the agenda.

SMcE indicated that there were some very high risks on the Register and there should be a plan to get out of Special Measures and indicated the monthly meeting which is held with the Department. The CEO said that everything in the Business Plan is moving towards getting out of special measures. He added he would send out a selection of dates for training.

**11. Chairs Expenses and Gifts**

For noting.

**12. Information Management and Governance**

The CEO directed members to the document, advising that this sets out the key workstreams.

SMcE enquired if this would be taken to Council.

13. Publication Scheme

14. Draft Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plan

15. Anti-Fraud and Bribery Policy

SMcE said that members could put their concerns in writing on the Publication Scheme and the CEO said to also include any other concerns on the other policies.

**16. Strategic Review**

The CEO discussed forming small working group with 1 member from each Committee to work on a strategic financial review of income and expenditure. This group would operate through the calendar year reporting to Council at the December meeting. He suggested it meet once a month starting next quarter but that it was for Council to decide.SL enquired what benefits this would have. The Chair said it would bring perspectives from other Committees with options for addressing concerns and recommendations. SMcE added that it would be good to do this if the organization was out of special measures but voiced her concerns that it could be over burdened and suggested it would be better to wait until next year’s business plan. The CEO advised that undertaking this review was included in the Corporate Plan. He said it could be left for later and with initial preparatory work could be undertaken in 21/22.

SL agreed and said that it would be better to wait until members have had full training. The CEO said concerns would be noted.

**17. Training**

Discussed earlier in the meeting.

**18. AOB**

SMcE asked for an update on Special Measures. AB advised that progress was limited against certain operations and there was a continuing volume of correspondence regarding Council affairs being received by DE. There has been some progress on operational issues but there was still fundamental issues around Council tensions. The Council needs to function effectively and professionally

The CEO advised if members had any comments on policies put forward to direct these through the PA.

**19. Date of next meeting**

Friday 30 April 2021.