

**Minutes of Meeting of GTCNI Human Resources Committee
Held via Webex**

Thursday, 11th February 2021 at 10.30am

Present: John Kelly (Chair)
John Unsworth (Vice-Chair)
Martin Cromie (MC)
Ciara Duffy (CD)
Geraldine Duffy (GD)
Siobhan McElhinney (SMcE)
Brendan Morgan (BM)
Catriona Mullan (CM)

Apologies: Clodhna Scott-Wills (CSW)

In Attendance: Alison Chambers (AC), DE representative
Sam Gallaher (CEO)
[REDACTED] (EL), Notetaker

Action

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting. Apologies were noted from CSW.

2. Declarations of Interest

The Chair advised that no Declarations of Interest had been received prior to the meeting and none were declared by Committee Members.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting (11th November 2020 – HR-20-18-Min)

The Chair advised that the previous minutes should refer to the meeting of 11th November 2020, and not as noted in the agenda which referred to minutes dated 16th September 2020. This was noted by Committee.

The Chair asked Committee if they wished to raise any issues regarding the previous minutes. There were no issues raised and the minutes were proposed and seconded as an accurate account of the meeting of 11th November 2020 as below:

**For
noting**

Proposed: JU
Seconded: CM

4. Matters arising from the Minutes

Actions from the previous meeting were discussed as below and as detailed in the Actions Register.

HR/20/15 A7 – NIPSA Staff Survey – Emotional Resilience Training

The CEO suggested that training should be put on hold until the results of the Staff Survey had been dealt with. Action to be kept open to consider resilience training in due course.

**HR/20/15
A7**

HR-20-17-A3 – Working arrangements re Covid 19 – JU advised he would provide the CEO with contact details of relevant EA person to share documentation about staff working arrangements.

**HR-20-17-
A3**

HR-20-17-A2 – HR Matters – FOI/SAR – AC agreed to follow up with DE to check advice regarding FOI/ SAR information.

**HR-20-17-
A2**

5. Chair Correspondence

The Chair advised of one piece of correspondence received regarding an item discussed at the previous Committee meeting. This related to the progress of grievance hearings where the option of using another provider was discussed. DE were contacted to seek information but nothing had been received from them since December so the Chair said he would follow up on this.

**HR-21-19
A1**

The Vice-Chair advised that one grievance was still to be addressed while the second grievance was now an appeal against a decision regarding a Fixed Term Contract. He advised he would arrange a discussion with the HR Sub-Committee (Chair, Vice-Chair and CD) to try to progress the outstanding cases as soon as possible, with the advice of HR Advisers.

**HR-21-19-
A2**

The Committee agreed to this approach.

6. Update on ongoing HR matters (HR-21-19-01)

The CEO referred to the report circulated and provided an overview of the main points as follows:

NIPSA Staff Survey

The CEO advised that a number of avenues had been explored to look at the option of appointing a new HR provider, including discussions with the Business Consultancy Service (of DoF). Various other bodies were considered including the NI Civil Servant HR Connect, but none of these were suitable. Independent HR Consultants were then approached and their proposals had been circulated to Members. Cost quoted were £8,450 and £4,400 respectively. It was for the Committee to decide how to progress. Approval of a business case by the Permanent Secretary of DE would be necessary and procurement would have to be in line with guidance. Concern was raised about possible negative staff perception of HR providers chosen by the CEO, the CEO assured Members that this was a suggestion made by the Committee (at 11th November 2020 meeting) and it would be their decision on how they wished to proceed. Other than facilitation he had no other involvement..

The CEO advised that both providers had indicated that they could do this work in March, so a final proposal needed to be decided on, a Business Case submitted and approved (with the help of AC) and once formal procurement was complete work could then begin as soon as possible.

The Vice-Chair concurred with these views and advised that a diagnosis report of where the problems lay should be prepared along with recommendations for further action which could be added to the HR Action Plan.

It was agreed by Committee that, within two weeks, GD, CM and SMcE should meet the two providers (rather than the HR Sub-Committee, who would be concentrating on grievance panel priorities). Then provide feedback to Members to decide which provider to use. Then the CEO to prepare a Business Case for approval by DE.

**HR-21-19
A3**

**HR-21-19
A4**

NIPSA Agreement

The CEO provided an update on three outstanding Tribunal cases.

Case 1 - There had been no response to date from the complainant concerning a revised statement. This was being followed up by GTCNI legal advisers, although the aspect of 'protected disclosure' has now been removed by the complainant from the case.

Case 2 – A statement had been received from the complainant and a response was currently being prepared, which the CEO advised would be a priority for the rest of the month. This case was significant. This matter and related activities has been ongoing for two years impacting on health and family.

Case 3 – The complainant was disputing compensation offered under VES. . A 'without prejudice' discussion had taken place in October 2020 without success. Following a tribunal review hearing in December 20 the claimant sought engagement through the LRA. The matter has now been resolved and the complainant has withdrawn their grievance and IT complaint. The matter is closed, and GTCNI has recouped compensation from DE.

(Council Members noted that there were issues with sound quality/ connection of the Chair and the CEO).

Phase 1 of the Staff Handbook - (which was due to be discussed under Item 8 of the agenda).

Information Management and Governance review - the CEO circulated a job description to Members for information, with a view to appointing a designated two-year resource to help with this work at a salary of c.£30-35K (F&GP Committee document refers). This role could be a secondment and could be seen as a development opportunity for someone from within the organisation. Alternatively, a staff member could be trained to carry out this role, but that would require more time.

Members discussed whether the salary offered was competitive enough to attract the right candidates. Also, whether a Bachelors' Degree was essential for the role and could that be described as 'desirable' so that the pool of candidates could be widened.

The CEO advised this was an outline job description and dates had not been finalised so he would take these points on board and consider them further. He added that this was a sizeable piece of work and GTCNI may need a part-time resource to manage Information Management and Governance on an ongoing basis in future.

Covid-19 update – The CEO said it was expected that staff would continue to work from home until at least the Summer, but that the necessary processes to allow return to work would be carried out.

2021 Pay Award – The CEO advised that Business Case for the 2021 pay award was being finalised and the outcome of JNCC negotiations regarding a pay award for 2021/22 was awaited. These pay awards relate to all staff with the exception of the CEO.

FTC issue - The CEO advised that an operational issue had emerged where a member of staff undertaking additional duties had returned to their substantive role. Backfilling to enable this person to undertake these duties had been provided via an additional member of staff appointed on a fixed term contract. . Some members queried if this position would become permanent if the FTC was to be extended, and if someone was taken on to backfill would that mean that two people would be doing the same job.

The CEO advised that regarding the person taking on additional work there he had no desire to change the arrangement, pending the restructure, but the person had stated that they no longer wanted the arrangement to continue so as CEO he needed to consider options in present circumstances and was reluctant to make a quick decision. There was no intention at this point to extend the FTC beyond the term applied for which would be within four years. The CEO concluded that he was currently considering the entire matter..

SMcE commented that this issue strayed into operational territory and suggested it would be useful to see an organisational structure showing each role to provide clarity on this issue.

The Vice-Chair questioned why Committee was discussing this issue when they were not required to make a decision on it. However, the Vice-Chair agreed that it would be helpful to see an organisational chart, to include details of ‘acting up’ arrangements, but that this was an operational matter and not the role of the HR Committee to consider.

(Council Members noted that there were again issues with sound quality and connection of the Chair and CEO, and it was agreed to take a break).

GD advised she needed to leave the meeting at this point.

Break from 12.05pm to 12.20pm.

7. HR Policy Review and New Staff Handbook Phase 1 (HR-20-19-02)

(The Chair and CEO again had sound and/or connection issues, and Committee considered whether to continue with the meeting or to reconvene, but it was agreed to try to continue).

The CEO referred to the review of policies by the HR Advisers and the development of a new Staff Handbook. A staff consultation on a first tranche of policies was initiated in March 2020 at this was now complete. The feedback had been considered and policies amended as appropriate. The policies were brought to the Committee for recommendation to Council for adoption. It was emphasised that the policy on Employee Appraisal Scheme had been referred back to the NIPSA representative with a further request for feedback. No response had been received as yet. Consultation on a second tranche of policies would commence end of February with a further third consultation taking place after Easter. The aim is to complete approval of the Staff Handbook by the autumn. The CEO asked if the Committee were content to adopt the first tranche of policies.

The Vice-Chair acknowledged and thanked the CEO and staff for the work carried out to date on this policy review and was delighted to see the volume of feedback received with the help of Headstogether to get to this point. This ensured, firstly, that the organisation was up to date with best practice, and secondly, that staff had been fully involved and the process was appropriate and robust.

The Vice-Chair therefore recommended that Committee adopt the policies listed here and the one further policy when response was received from NIPSA.

The Committee agreed to this proposal and it was carried as follows:

Proposed JU
Seconded MC

The CEO advised that staff feedback had highlighted areas where procedures need to be defined associated with the Dignity at Work Policy and Grievance Policy. These relate to the possibility of issues/complaints being raised against Council Members or the CEO. The CEO proposed that Headstogether be asked to prepare a draft proposition for the Committee to consider which, once agreed, would then be a procedure added as an Addendum to the main policy.

(While Committee were discussing this issue, the Chair dropped off the call completely and Committee agreed that the Vice-Chair should continue to chair the meeting).

After some discussion about where this issue was identified and had been documented, the Vice-Chair summarised that there were two options:

1. Committee to ask CEO to proceed to ask HR provider to progress, or,
2. Committee to ask CEO to revert with a paper which identified the gaps in policy.

Committee agreed the minute of this meeting would provide the documentation of what was required, and that the CEO should proceed with both options, i.e., circulate details of the issues highlighted to Committee and ask the HR provider to progress a policy for these gaps.

**HR-21-19
A5**

8. Business Planning for 2021/2022 (verbal)

The CEO advised that progressing the Business Plan for 2020/21 had been adversely impacted due to Covid-19 and that the plan for 2021/22 would largely comprise a carry forward of work-streams from the present year. It was important to be cautious given that the pandemic situation remained uncertain. In the area of HR the plan for 2021/22 will include three main items: completion of Staff Handbook and Policy Review; implement Employee Appraisal Scheme; and complete staffing structure. All of these sit within the current HR Action Plan. In addition to these there will be usual monitoring of staff absence. .

CM left the meeting at 1pm.

The CEO advised that a settled structure was needed, Phase 1 of the Staff Handbook needed to be completed and Staff Appraisal Scheme needed to be introduced. These three areas needed to be progressed quickly and would drive any Training and Development programme.

The CEO added that the other issue to be considered was remote working and what place it had in GTCNI for the future,. The building lease was due to expire in March 22 and future requirements needed to be considered. For noting

The Vice-Chair checked and confirmed that the meeting remained quorate.

The Vice-Chair noted that the plans the CEO outlined were sensible and that a Business Plan would be delivered in due course.

The CEO advised the Business Plan should be available for next Council meeting which would give Members the opportunity to consider if anything else was needed. The Committee agreed with this approach.

SMcE mentioned that, before the break, Committee had discussed circulation of a staff organisation chart and asked what conclusion was reached about that.

The CEO advised he would circulate the organisational chart to include the current structure, acting up arrangements and what the anticipated new structure would look like. HR-21-19
A6

MC left the meeting at 1.03pm.

The Vice-Chair noted that the meeting still remained quorate.

The CEO suggested that further items could be deferred.

The Vice-Chair reviewed the remainder of the agenda and asked for an update on Agenda Item No. 9 (HR Action Plan) and brief updates on the remaining items.

9. HR Action Plan (to include restructure) (HR-21-19-03)

The Vice-Chair asked if there was anything HR specific and suggested that the restructure might be of concern regarding the HR Action Plan.

The CEO advised he had sent out an update on the HR Action Plan that highlighted progress and some outstanding areas. The area the CEO was most concerned about was achieving a settled structure but due to the challenging

circumstances, progress is proving difficult. The CEO advised that work was c.3 months behind regarding preparation of Business Case to review job descriptions and carry out evaluation. Other urgent matters tend to encroach on the time available. . . As advised previously, it was hoped to take a Business Case to Council in March, and to initiate a consultation after this. This item remains a key priority. The CEO added that Tribunal matters had proved more time consuming than anticipated.

The Vice-Chair advised Committee appreciated the workload that the CEO and his staff had and asked if work relating to Tribunals would affect the restructure.

The CEO said it would not necessarily affect the restructure but that it was best to proceed when cases were finalised and closed.

The Vice-Chair thanked the CEO for the ongoing work which was appreciated and advised that Committee would understand if the Business Plan was not ready for March Council meeting.

The CEO added that it was planned to tender for new HR Advisers in the latter half of 2021/22.

SMcE advised that Committee would rely on AC's advice regarding timing of the tender process. SMcE also advised caution regarding the FTC issue to ensure no financial implications arose in managing this case.

The CEO advised it was planned to have Business Case ready by the end of June, then a procurement exercise could take place in the Autumn with a view to engaging a new supplier by 31 March 2022.

AC concurred that it was sensible if the Business Case was with DE by end of June to allow time to engage a new supplier by March.

For noting

10. Absence Report (HR-21-19-04)

The CEO advised the report was in line with expectations and there was nothing further to report.

Noted.

11. Corporate Risk Register (HR-21-19-05)

This item was not discussed.

12. Effectiveness Review

The CEO advised he would circulate via email a form for members to comment on the operation of the Committee along the lines agreed at the PRRC meeting (earlier week commencing 08 February 2021).

**HR-21-19
A7**

13. AOB

No other business was discussed.

The Vice-Chair asked the remainder of Committee if they were content that all items had been covered sufficiently. Committee confirmed this was the case.

The Vice-Chair thanked the CEO for the information provided in spite of the technical difficulties experienced throughout the meeting.

14. Date of next meeting

As previously advised, date of next meeting was 27th May 2021.

With no further business discussed, the Vice-Chair closed the meeting at 1.19pm.

Actions Register

Actions raised on 11 November 2020

Action No.	Item	Details	Owner	By when	Status
HR-21-19-A1	Chair Corr - Grievance Hearing advice from DE	Chair to follow up with DE in getting advice of using another provider to assist with grievance hearings.	Chair	May	Open
HR-21-19-A2	Chair Corr – meeting of Sub-Committee	Vice-Chair to arrange a discussion with the Sub-Committee to try to progress outstanding grievances asap.	Vice-Chair	May	Open
HR-21-19-A3	NIPSA Staff Survey – appointment of independent HR consultant	GD, CM and SMcE to meet the two suggested providers, provide feedback to Members to decide which provider to use.	GD, CM, SMcE	Mar	Open
HR-21-19-A4	Staff– Business Case	CEO to prepare a Business Case for approval by DE.	CEO	May	Open
HR-21-19-A5	HR Policy Review – gaps in policy.	CEO to circulate details of the issues highlighted and ask the HR provider to progress policy for these gaps.	CEO	Mar	Open
HR-21-19-A6	HR Matters – org chart	CEO to circulate staff organisational chart to include the current structure, acting up arrangements and what the anticipated new structure would look like.	CEO	Mar	Open
HR-21-19-A7	Effectiveness Review	CEO to circulate email Committee Evaluation form.	CEO	Mar	Open

Actions carried forward

Action No.	Item	Details	Owner	by when	Status
HR/20/15 A07	NIPSA Staff Survey / Resilience Training	ABT and CEO to discuss providing the Emotional Resilience training noted above to staff. Update 16 Sep – CEO advised discussion had taken place but costs and Covid 19 implications and value of eLearning with H2G needed to be determined before progressing. Work in progress. Update 11/11 – work ongoing. Update 11/02 - The CEO suggested that training should be put on hold until the results of the Staff Survey had been dealt with. Action to remain open.	ABT / CEO	Update May	Open
HR-20-17-A03	Working arrangements re Covid 19	JU to share information from EA on plans to return staff to office working. Update 11/02 – JU to provide the CEO with contact details of DA person to share relevant documentation.	JU	May	Open

Closed Actions

Action No.	Item	Details	Owner	By when	Status
HR-20-17-A02	HR Matters – FOI / SAR	CEO/BM to share advice from DE on possible options for help with FOI/SAR.	CEO/ BM		Closed
HR-20-18-A2	HR Matters – External Facilitator	Committee to send suggestions of appropriate external HR Facilitators to the Chief Executive for consideration.	All	Jan	Closed

HR-20-18-A3	HR Matters – External Facilitator	SMcE agreed to liaise with the Chief Executive and BM to prepare this statement and circulate to C'tee before issue.	SMcE	Jan	Closed
HR-20-18-A5	HR Matters – Grievances	JU to forward further information, when received, to Committee to progress outstanding Grievances.	JU	Jan	Closed
HR-20-18-A6	HR Matters - Handbook	The Chief Executive to contact NIPSA one more time with a suggestion of two dates and update Committee at next meeting.	SG	Jan	Closed
HR-20-18-A8	Date of next meeting	The Chief Executive to circulate calendar of meetings for 2021 when available.	SG	Dec	Closed
HR-20-18-A4	HR Matters – Industrial Tribunals	The Chief Executive to progress cases as discussed and update Committee at next meeting.	SG	Jan	Closed
HR-20-18-A7	Staff Restructure	An update on the latest position regarding the restructure to be tabled at next meeting.	SG	Jan	Closed
HR-20-17-A04	Working arrangements re Covid 19.	Issues raised to be considered by Committee and discussed further at next meeting. Update 11/11 – SMcE to share Risk Assessment guidelines with	All SMcE	Jan	Closed
HR-20-18-A01	HR Matters – External Facilitator	The Chief Executive to explore options of engaging an appropriately qualified external Facilitator and revert to Committee with details.	SG	Jan	Closed