

**Minutes of Meeting of GTCNI Human Resources Committee  
Held via 'Zoom'**

**Wednesday, 11 November 2020 at 10.30am**

**Present:** John Kelly (Chair)  
Ciara Duffy (CD)  
Geraldine Duffy (GD)  
Siobhan McElhinney (SMcE)  
Catriona Mullan (CM)  
Clíodhna Scott-Wills (CSW) (left early, due to attend another meeting at 11am).  
John Unsworth (JU)

**Apologies:** Martin Cromie (MC), Brendan Morgan (BM).

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

**Action**

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting. Apologies were noted from MC and BM.

The Chair suggested the meeting adjourn at 11am to 11.15am to allow Members to observe a minute's silence for Remembrance Day, if they so wished. It was agreed that a break would be taken at this time.

The Chief Executive advised that he wished to raise an item under AOB relating to the HeadsTogether contract. Committee agreed to discuss this item if time permitted.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

The Chair advised that three Declarations of Interest forms had been received by the Chief Executive's Office prior to the meeting. No Declarations of Interest were recorded.

**3. Minutes of Previous Meeting (16<sup>th</sup> June 2020 – HR-20-17-Min)**

The Chair advised there were two sets of minutes to review from the previous meeting, the minutes of the meeting and the "In Committee" minutes, both dated 16th September 2020.

The Chair asked Board if they wished to raise any issues regarding either set of minutes. There were no issues raised about the content of either sets of minutes, however, it was requested that papers be issued five working days before the meeting, to allow Members time to review. The Chair said this point would be

taken on board. The Chief Executive acknowledge this point and advised this was due to a number of meetings being accommodated within short timeframe. Both sets of minutes were proposed and seconded as an accurate account of both meetings as below:

**For  
noting**

Main minutes from 16<sup>th</sup> September:

**Proposed:** JU

**Seconded:** CD

“In Committee” minutes from 16<sup>th</sup> September:

**Proposed:** JU

**Seconded:** CD

#### **4. Matters arising from the Minutes**

Matters arising from the “In Committee” minutes would be discussed later in the meeting. Actions from the previous meeting were discussed as below and as detailed in the Actions Register.

**HR-20-17-A03 and A04** – Working arrangements re Covid 19 - JU advised EA’s position remained that staff did not work in offices unless it was impossible for them to work from home (which followed Government guidelines). It was recommended that GTCNI follow these guidelines and advise staff not to travel unless it was unavoidable. . The Chief Executive advised GTCNI was operating in this way but pointed out that planning would be required at some point for a return to offices and a Risk Assessment was needed to ensure that steps were in place to keep staff as safe and secure as possible. At present staff (if necessary) must only visit office with line manager approval. SMcE advised she had guidelines on preparing a Risk Assessment which she would share with the Chief Executive. Action to be carried forward for further discussion at next meeting.

**HR-20-17-  
A4**

#### **5. Chair Correspondence**

The Chair advised he had met with JU and CD to review outstanding grievances. However, in order not to prejudice these cases, Committee were advised it was not appropriate to share details of the correspondence received with them at this time.

The Chair advised that no other correspondence received since last meeting.

#### **6. Update on ongoing HR matters (HR-20-18-01)**

##### NIPSA Staff Survey

The Chief Executive referred to information circulated to Members detailing advice received from HeadsTogether on future engagement/approach to NIPSA Staff Survey and email correspondence between BM and HeadsTogether. Committee needed to decide on how to take this issue forward and decide if it should be taken to Council to seek their input.

Committee commented that they were not HR experts and did not feel qualified to engage directly with staff about the issues they had raised. The survey suggests HR Advisors were not seen by staff as impartial. It was suggested that advice be taken from EA, who had been very supportive in the past.

The Chief Executive suggested the following options to approach this issue:

1. Seek the help of wider Council Members to manage a process with appropriate preparations.
2. Consider engagement of an external Facilitator to undertake further investigation which would be completely impartial.
3. Take the issue to Council to seek their opinion.

The Committee continued to discuss the matter, with the main points as follows:

- Committee/Council should use data and follow up the Staff Survey to inform improvements which could allay the fears of staff.
- Work to get staff on board and improve the results ahead of any future survey.
- It was noted there appeared to be disconnect between what came through NIPSA feedback and experience in staff meetings and 1.2.1 conversations. Although the survey reflected negative comments about HeadsTogether, staff continue to seek advice from them.
- Committee discussed if the existing HR Action Plan was fit for purpose and whether a new Plan was needed. The Chief Executive advised that the current plan was developed in response to a similar survey situation in 2019 and had been agreed by NIPSA. It was being pursued for example all Policies had been reviewed with a phased programme of staff consultation on a new Staff Handbook, however this work would not be fully completed until next Summer.
- Committee were disappointed and concerned with the feedback from staff via NIPSA regarding the Dignity at Work Charter.
- The issues that staff have raised about the HR provider could not be ignored and require further enquiry

**The Chair noted the time was 11.14am and advised the meeting would be adjourned until 11.25am.**

Discussion was resumed regarding HR Matters.

The Chief Executive agreed, on behalf of the Committee, to explore the option of engaging an appropriate external Facilitator while considering cost and procurement and revert to the Committee for a decision.

**HR-20-18-A1**

Committee to send suggestions of appropriate candidates to the Chief Executive for consideration.

**HR-20-18-A2**

Committee agreed that a brief “holding statement” should be issued to staff to provide reassurance that Council are endeavouring to resolve their issues. SMcE agreed to liaise with the Chief Executive and BM to prepare this statement and circulate to Committee members before issue.

**HR-20-18-A3**

The Committee agreed to this course of action and it was proposed and seconded as follows:

**Proposed** CSW  
**Seconded** GD

The Committee also agreed that the HR Action Plan be a standing item on the agenda going forward.

**For  
noting**

#### Industrial Tribunals

The Chief Executive gave a brief update to Committee on Tribunal cases presently ongoing, summarised as follows:

**HR-20-18-  
A4**

Case 1 was due to be heard in December but, due to a mix up by the Tribunal services this has now been put back to October 2021. Work will continue on the review and amendment of statements in light of 'protective disclosures' of the being withdrawn.

Case 2 has been scheduled for hearing in April 2021 a case conference had taken place and case management schedule agreed. Meetings had taken place with the Council's legal advisers and preparation for defence of this case underway.

Case 3 a response was lodged with the Tribunal Service and timelines are awaited from them. "Without prejudice" discussion had taken place with the Claimant without satisfactory resolution so it will proceed to Tribunal. Counsel engagement will be necessary and the Committee agreed to proceed on this basis.

#### New Employee Handbook – Phase 1

The Chief Executive advised that it had been agreed to review policies with consultation on a phased basis. Feedback had been received from NIPSA members in August and no feedback received from non-Members. Work was ongoing to consider feedback and refine policies as necessary under the Finance & Contracts Manager. The aim is to complete the Phase 1 review by year end and submit policies for sign-off to Committee and Council in the next round of meetings in New Year. The Chief Executive indicated that Phase 2 consultation will commence in January 2021 with a view to bringing those policies to the second round of Council business meetings in 2021.

**For  
noting**

The Chief Executive asked Committee if they wanted the policies to be discussed again with NIPSA before coming to Committee. Committee agreed that they were happy to proceed on this basis.

**For  
noting**

The Chair asked if NIPSA had advised when a Joint Committee meeting could be arranged. The Chief Executive advised that his office had tried to contact NIPSA on numerous occasions but had received no response. Committee agreed that NIPSA should be contacted on one more occasion with a suggestion of two dates. The Chief Executive to update Committee at next meeting.

**HR-20-18-  
A5**

#### Recruitment of temporary Registration Officer

The Chief Executive advised that the recruitment process was currently ongoing for a temporary appointment for up to 9 months.

The Chair acknowledged that the Registration process was the remit of another Committee but asked how the Registration process was progressing in light of this vacancy. The Chief Executive advised that staff had shown great flexibility, teamwork and hard work in keeping most of the annual registration process on track in challenging circumstances. Effort had been concentrated on certain priorities and new teacher Registration had been completed over the summer months. The issuing of outstanding fee invoices had been deferred until

November and external support was engaged for the issuing of letters (4200 letters at a cost of c£2.5K). A reminder may need to be issued subject to the level of payments received by end of the month. Registrants have been informed that they will be de-registered by end of November if fee not paid. Less pressing registration matters will be picked up again in the New Year.

The Chief Executive advised staff were working additional hours under flexitime. He added that given the present circumstances all staff were accruing annual leave and a process on how to address this will be needed for 2021/22. Allowing time off in lieu or making paying up until September was under consideration. In any event the requirement for additional hours was being managed carefully via line managers.

The Chair asked the Chief Executive to convey the Committee's thanks to staff for their efforts which were very much appreciated under difficult circumstances.

**For  
noting**

#### **7. Absence Report (HR-20-18-02)**

The Chief Executive referred to the paper circulated.

It was noted that absence rates were significantly reduced compared to the same period last year for both incidence and cost of absence and were on target with nothing significant to report. Consideration is being given to comparing rates with other organisations within the DE Sector Managing Attendance Forum.

The Chair referred to Point 6 which said that in 2021 it was expected to see a 6% decline in absence. The Chief Executive explained this was not a decline of 6% but that staff absence rates were to be no more than 6% overall, which was on target. However, issues may emerge over coming months could impact the rate but absence will be addressed in line with Policy.

#### **8. Corporate Risk Register (HR-20-18-03)**

The Chief Executive advised the updated version of the Register had been circulated with two risks relating to the HR Committee. Risk 2 and Risk 10 related to the Action Plan and steps were being taken to reduce this risk. Residual risk remains high but should reduce as action is completed.

The Chair noted the amount of work and input needed to manage risks and maintain the Risk Register and thanked the Chief Executive and his team accordingly. The Chief Executive advised that the Finance & Contracts Manager was the owner of the Register and it was reviewed by management bi-monthly.

The Chief Executive added that work continues towards reducing risk but with a small team and underlying staff issues, this was a concern. The Covid 19 situation is not helping and some prioritisation across the whole Register was needed

#### **9. Staff Restructure (HR-20-18-04)**

The Chief Executive advised that work was ongoing but progress was slow due to other priorities Significant time had to be expended in relation to Tribunals

during October. Progressing the structure was now top priority of focus for the coming weeks. The Chief Executive would be liaising with HeadsTogether to move this timetable forward.

The Chair appreciated the timetable laid out and endorsed making this a major area of focus with the aim to progress recruitment in the New Year. The Chief Executive agreed but advised that recruitment could not begin until the Business Case was approved which could take at least two months. It was the aim to initiate the consultation and have the Business Case ready for submission for end of December. An update is to be provided at the next meeting.

**HR-20-18-  
A6**

#### HR Advisors Contract

The Chief Executive advised this discussion tied in with the HeadsTogether contract (due to be discussed under AOB). The initial phase of the contract was due to end in March 21 with the option to extend for a further year. The view of the Committee was sought on making a recommendation to Council. Members discussed areas relating to this contract in particular the risk to business continuity articulated by the CEO, the risk to fundamentally important processes in respect of staff restructuring, the lack of capacity for the production of a new business case at this time given the workload issues presented by the CEO, and his need to devote significant time to the restructuring work; and the risk to any ongoing work, HR action plan, current HR issues being addressed by the Committee and NIPSA survey.

The Committee sought the views of AC from a DE perspective. AC advised that it would appear tight in relation to business case development, business case approval, engagement with CPD and putting a procurement process in place in the timeframe outlined, this may present a risk to GTCNI in relation to securing a provider in time. SMcE asked what would be an appropriate timeframe. AC advised that the process of tendering for a new provider would take approximately 6 months. Committee agreed they would revisit the issue early next year with a view to beginning the process in summer of 2021 to have a contract in place for the following year.

On balance of all of the issues discussed and to ensure continuity the Chair proposed that the Committee agree that the contract with HeadsTogether be extended for a further 12 months with the possibility to renew or consider other options in early 2021/22.

The Committee agreed to this proposal and thanked AC for her advice.

**For noting**

**Proposed** JU  
**Seconded** CSW

#### **10. AOB**

There was no further business noted, as the HR Contract was discussed under 'Staff Restructure'.

#### **11. Date of next meeting**

The Chief Executive advised the calendar of meetings for 2021 was being prepared which would be circulated when available.

**HR-20-18-  
A7**

**With no further business discussed, the Chair closed the meeting at 1.05pm.**

## Actions Register

### Actions raised on 11 November 2020

Action No.	Item	Details	Owner	By when	Status
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	Open
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	Open
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	Open
HR-20-18-A4	HR Matters – Industrial Tribunals	Cases to progress as necessary and CEO to update Committee at next meeting.	SG	Jan	Open
HR-20-18-A5	HR Matters - Handbook	The Chief Executive to contact NIPSA one more time with a suggestion of two dates for Consultative Committee meeting.	SG	Jan	Open
HR-20-18-A6	Staff Restructure	An update on the restructure to be tabled at next meeting.	SG	Jan	Open
HR-20-18-A8	Date of next meeting	Calendar of meetings for 2021 to be circulated when available.	SG	Dec	Open

### Actions carried forward

Action No.	Item	Details	Owner	by when	Status
HR/20/15 A07	NIPSA Staff Survey	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.	ABT/ CEO	Jan	Open
HR-20-17-A02	HR Matters	BM to share advice from DE on possible options for help with FOI/SAR.	BM	Jan	Open
HR-20-17-A03	Working arrangements re Covid 19	JU to share information from EA on plans to return staff to office working.	JU	Jan	Open
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.	All SMcE	Jan	Open

### Closed Actions

Action No.	Item	Details	Owner	By when	Status
HR-20-17-A01	HR Matters	CEO would circulate update and brief outline of each Tribunal and follow up with Headstogether regarding correspondence they held on grievances to determine if ex-staff wanted to proceed with process.	CEO	Nov	Close
HR-20-17-A05	Staff Survey	BM to write to Headstogether to ask for proposal for Survey follow up approach and would copy Committee Members.	BM	Nov	Close

		Update 11/11 – to be discussed under HR Matters.			
HR/20/15 AP04	HR Action Plan	Finalised Dignity at Work Charter to be circulated to the HR Committee in due course. Update 16 Sep – CEO advised feedback had been received from NIPSA in Aug re proposed revised policy for Staff Handbook. Details to be worked through, discussed and agreed with HR and internally so currently work in progress. Update 11/11 – to be discussed under HR Matters.	CEO / ABT	Nov	Close
HR/20/15 AP08	NIPSA R& F Agreement	CEO to revert to NIPSA (Roisin Graham) and arrange a meeting to discuss the HR Committee's response to NIPSA's proposal. Update 16 Sep – CEO advised R Graham requested a copy of minutes to see what was agreed ahead of meeting. Update 11/11 – to be discussed under HR Matters.	CEO	Nov	Close