



BOARD MEETING
08 December 2015 @ 10.00am

PRESENT:

Judith Thompson (Chair - **JT**) Commissioner

IN ATTENDANCE:

John Beggs (**JB**) Secretary to the Commission
Adrian McNamee (**AMN**) Head of Policy and Research
Craig Gartley (**CG**) Head of Corporate Services
Sarah Beare (**SB**) - minutes

1. Apologies

1.1. There were no apologies.

2. Declaration of Interests

2.1. All attendees confirmed they had no conflict of interests.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

3.1. The minutes of the meeting on 10 November 2015 were approved.

4. Matters Arising

- 4.1. It was noted that changes were being made to the Commission's Unacceptable Behaviour Policy as requested by the Commissioner. The Department and VSS were advised of this at the last Trilateral meeting on 25 November 2015.
- 4.2. It was noted that refresher training for staff on the Unacceptable Behaviour Policy and Disability Awareness would take place on 11 January 2016. The Commissioner was happy with the course of action noting that training would help with any communication issues and would help staff to understand the Policy.
- 4.3. It was noted that the Commissioner was seeking advice on Resilience Training for staff and that a meeting had been scheduled for 11 December 2015.
- 4.4. The upcoming Review of the Victims Strategy would have a bearing on the research strategy of the Commission and any potential ways of undertaking research would be influenced by its recommendations. It was agreed that responses to Research Proposals received would be sent, advising that it would be considered within that context at a later date.

ACTION: AMN

4.5. Following attendance at the Standards meeting on 04 December 2015 it was noted that no agreement had been reached on the accreditation of prior learning for Life Coaches and that it had been referred back to the Commission for a decision. The Commissioner asked **AMN** to find out if there was a Governing or Regulatory Body which could assist.

ACTION: AMN

4.6. It was agreed to seek meetings with Junior Ministers and follow up on requests to meet Special Advisors.

ACTION: SB

5. Annual Report and Accounts

- 5.1. It was noted that there were no outstanding issues and it was agreed to remove this item from the Agenda.

6. Accounting Officer Update

Budget

- 6.1. **JB** noted that Mark Browne, Departmental Accounting Officer had confirmed there would be no further budget cuts in year.
- 6.2. It was advised the January Monitoring Round had been called at short notice for submission on 01 December 2015. An extension had been granted with submission required by 02 December 2015.
- 6.3. After a comprehensive review of budget profiles by SMT, the Commission eased a total of £31,000 from the salaries budget in the January Monitoring Round. This included:
- £17,000 – requested as a reallocation from Resource to Capital but was allocated as additional Capital funding in the October Monitoring Round.
 - £14,000 – additional funding from OFMDFM to provide for increased Employers Pension contributions in the October Monitoring Round. This expenditure was provided for within the current budget and was therefore eased from Salaries in the Resource budget in the January Monitoring Round.
- 6.4. **CG** highlighted fixed costs and cumulative spend to date. Each budget line was reviewed and options and plans to undertake expenditure of all available funds were discussed, in the context of pressures on the capacity of staff and the time left until the end of the year to undertake and complete any proposed work. This included research plans which may straddle 2015/16 – 2016/17 and legal advice that may be required in response to emerging events.
- 6.5. Commitment was made to progress work priorities and procure resources in order to fully utilise the available budget for 2015/16. **CG** raised concerns about the completion of all expenditure by the end of March 2015.
- 6.6. It was agreed that in Quarter 4 the Budget Report would be presented in order to reflect expenditure, including staff time and salaries, across all relevant budget lines, primarily programme costs.

ACTION: CG

- 6.7. It was agreed that **CG** and **JB** would meet to discuss the budget and specifications for the recruitment of temporary staff to fill funded vacancies up to the end of March 2016.

ACTION: CG and JB

- 6.8. It was agreed to advise the Chair of the ARC of the easement in the January Monitoring Round.

ACTION: JB

Update on Business Cases and Procurement (Delegated decisions)

- 6.9. The schedule was reviewed and new projects noted.

Performance Report

- 6.10. The Business Plan was discussed. Targets that have been completed were noted and it was advised all remaining targets were on track for delivery. It was noted that the next quarterly update was due by the end of December. The Business Plan and Risk Register would be updated at this time for the ARC and Accountability meetings in January 2016.

ACTION: CG and AMN

- 6.11. It was noted that the Business Plan was currently under review by Ministers.
- 6.12. It was advised that planning for the Corporate Plan 2016-19 and Business Plan 2016/17 began at the Corporate Planning Day on 03 December 2015. It was agreed to type up and distribute notes from the Corporate Planning Day.

ACTION: CG and AMN

6.13. It was agreed to organise a planning meeting for SMT and the Commissioner before the Christmas break in order to produce a draft Corporate Plan and Business Plan by 31 January 2016.

ACTION: SB

6.14. It was agreed to hold a Planning Day for Commission Staff and the Forum in early February 2016 to discuss priorities for 2016-19.

ACTION: SB

Internal Audit

6.15. It was noted that ASM fieldwork had begun on the follow up review for Financial Reporting and Budgetary Control in the week commencing 30 November 2015 and fieldwork on Information Management and Security had begun in the week commencing 7 December 2015.

6.16. It was noted that an updated Financial Procedures Manual was in place and that it had been reviewed and approved by Internal Audit.

Risk Management

6.17. The changes to the Risk Register were agreed. It was noted that there were 3 medium and 2 low risks.

6.18. It was agreed to update CR3 to reflect high level meetings held by the Commissioner regarding the Stormont House Agreement.

ACTION: AMN

6.19. **CG** highlighted that Finance, Administration and Governance was at risk of an underspend but that corrective action was being taken to prevent this.

Decisions referred to Board from SMT

6.20. Policies due for review were noted for consideration later in the agenda.

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) – New Members Recruitment

6.21. It was noted that the revisions to the Terms of Reference for the ARAC were being progressed. The main changes were noted as the essential and desirable criteria.

Recruitment – Head of Engagement and Communication

6.22. The Job Description was currently under review and recruitment would be progressed once it had been approved.

6.23. At a meeting with the HR Service Provider on 04 December 2015, the Commission were advised to meet with the DFP Job Evaluation Grading Team regarding the new post of Head of Engagement and Communication.

ACTION: CG

Communications Strategy

6.24. **JB** advised the Commission was progressing procurement to obtain services to draft a Communications Strategy for the Commission in line with the 2016-19 Corporate Plan.

6.25. As part of the procurement exercise the Commission would be seeking a review of the organisations branding and recommendations for appropriate updating.

6.26. **JB** expressed concern that expenditure indicated in the approved DAC for Communications Services until year end was not sufficient to cover upcoming work around the Stormont House Agreement.

6.27. It was noted that the DAC had been initiated and extended in order to ensure there was continuity of Communications Services upon the appointment of a new Commissioner.

6.28. Following consultation with CPD in order to determine how to extend expenditure within the timeframe of the DAC, it was agreed that the Commission would engage in an interim Communications contract from 01 January – 31 March 2016.

Forum

- 6.29. It was noted that a draft Business Case for the Appointment of an Advisory Panel to the Victims and Survivors Forum had been prepared by the Forum Manager for consideration.
- 6.30. The Commissioner reiterated that the advertisement would need to be circulated outside of Northern Ireland.
- 6.31. It was noted that the Commissioner had been receiving queries about replenishment of the Forum and had to acknowledge that the current Forum was not balanced. She raised the urgency of the Appointment of an Advisory Panel to the Victims and Survivors Forum.
- 6.32. **JB** outlined the proposed process and highlighted the pressures in relation to administration foreseen for March/April 2016. It was noted that external service providers with an HR skill set could be procured to assist with administration.
- 6.33. It was agreed to advise the Forum of the proposed process at the next meeting on 17 December 2015.

ACTION: AMN

- 6.34. Assurance was given that the Appointment of an Advisory Panel to the Victims and Survivors Forum could be completed within the existing budget.
- 6.35. The Commissioner suggested that a Social Media Policy be considered for the new Panel/Forum once appointed.
- 6.36. It was noted that the Invitation to Tender was expected to go out on Friday 18 December 2015.

Gifts & Hospitality

- 6.37. All Gifts and Hospitality for the last quarter had been recorded and approved by the Accounting Officer. No exceptional gifts or hospitality had been received or provided.
- 6.38. All Registers for the last quarter were available on the Commission's website.

Fraud

- 6.39. There had been no reported instances of fraud during the reported period.

Freedom of Information

- 6.40. No FOI requests had been received this quarter.

Complaints

- 6.41. No Complaints had been received this quarter.

Review of the Commission

- 6.42. It was advised the next triennial review would take place in early 2016/17.

7. Business Plan 2015-16

- 7.1. As per the Accounting Officers update.

8. Risk Register

- 8.1. As per the Accounting Officers update.

9. Restructure and Staff Recruitment

- 9.1. It was noted that a meeting took place with the HR Service Provider on 04 December 2015 regarding the restructuring of staff. Assurance was provided that the Commission were following correct procedures. It was agreed that the Admin Officer role would remain a general administration position to allow flexibility.
- 9.2. The appointment of a temporary member of staff to assist with Research Projects was being progressed. The Commissioner asked for the process to be clarified. **JB** advised that Agencies on the framework would be contacted and asked to source a candidate based on the specification provided.

- 9.3. The Commissioner asked for clarification on alternative options should Agencies within the framework be unable to supply a suitable candidate within the Commission's timeframe. **JB** advised that this provided a rationale to contact Agencies outside the framework and should this not provide a suitable candidate, there would be an option to procure an external service provider.

10.Policies

Annual Leave

- 10.1. **JB** provided background to the existing and new Annual Leave Policy, confirming that the Commission's Policy would be brought in line with NICS.
- 10.2. **JT** advised that she accepted the principles of adopting the NICS Policy but highlighted that staff need to avail of leave for wellbeing.
- 10.3. The Annual Leave Policy was approved with effect from 01 February 2016.

Proposal for Office Closure

- 10.4. The proposal to close the Commission office for a period of time at Christmas and Easter was discussed.
- 10.5. **JB** confirmed that the VSS and other Commission's in Equality House close during the Christmas period.
- 10.6. The Commissioner advised that she was content to close the office over the Christmas period as long as Business Continuity Procedures were in place.
- 10.7. It was noted that staff had been consulted and no issues had been raised regarding closure of the office during the Christmas period. Issues were highlighted regarding Easter.
- 10.8. It was agreed to disregard closure at Easter and to close over Christmas, effective from 01 February 2016. SMT would consider the impact on staff for Christmas 2015 at the next meeting on 14 December 2015.

ACTION: SMT

Flexible Working Policy

- 10.9. **JB** provided background to the existing and new Flexible Working Policy, confirming that the Commission's Policy would be brought in line with NICS.
- 10.10. The Flexible Working Policy was approved.
- 10.11. Amendments were discussed and the Policy was approved.

Accessible Information Policy

- 10.12. Amendments were discussed and the Policy was approved.

Anti Fraud Policy

- 10.13. Amendments were discussed and the Policy was approved.

Clear Desk Policy

- 10.14. Amendments were discussed and the Policy was approved.

Code of Conduct Policy

- 10.15. Amendments were discussed and the Policy was approved.

Social Media Policy

- 10.16. Amendments were discussed and the Policy was approved.

Data Protection Policy

- 10.17. The Commissioner asked if the Commission have a Policy regarding Client Data and noted that the Data Protection Policy was specific to staff. **JB** confirmed that this would fall under the Information Security Policy which was being reviewed by Internal Audit as part of their Information Management and Security fieldwork.

10.18. Amendments were discussed and the Policy was approved.

Dignity at Work Policy

10.19. Amendments were discussed and the Policy was approved.

External Complaints Policy

10.20. Amendments were discussed and the Policy was approved.

Learning and Development Policy

10.21. Amendments were discussed and the Policy was approved.

11.AOB

Commission Conference

11.1. It was noted that a venue, dates and draft programme for the Conference had been agreed at a meeting of the Conference Working Group on 4 December 2015. **AMN** outlined the draft programme.

NAME: **Judith Thompson**

SIGNED:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judith Thompson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

DATE: 19/01/16