



## SOUTH EASTERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

### Minutes of a Meeting of the Financial and General Purposes Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)

held on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2025, at 17:30, in Meeting Room D Floor, Lisburn Campus

#### 1. Chairs Business

##### a) Attendance and apologies

**Present:** Mr Alan McCrum, Mr Derek Wilson, Mr Tommy Martin (Principal & Chief Executive), Ms. Majella Corrigan, Mr Steven Lee, Ms Pauline Leeson, Ms Grainne McVeigh, Mr John Nugent (Chair of the Governing Body), Mrs Deborah O’Hare, Dr Danny McConnell

**In attendance:** Mrs Heather McKee (Deputy Principal Planning Performance & Engagement) ‘DPPPE’, Mrs Emma Carson (Acting Director HR & Facilities), Mrs Claire Williamson (Secretary to the Governing Body), Mr David McCullough (Head of Finance), Mr Andrew Emmett (Acting Director IT & Finance),

**Apologies:** None

**In the Chair:** Mr McCrum

The Chair began by welcoming Grainne McVeigh to her first meeting of the committee and noted that this would be Deborah O’Hare’s last meeting as she takes up a new position as Chair of CCEA. The Chair of the GB thanked Mrs O’Hare for her significant contribution to the GB over the last 4 years and noted that everything she did always had the student at the centre. Mrs O’Hare thanked everyone for their kind words and added she had enjoyed her time at SERC, and it had been an absolute privilege.

### b) Declarations of Conflict of Interests

The following conflicts were declared:

- Ms Corrigan declared she is employed by CCMS whose sponsor department is DENI. She is a current member of the Governing Body of Stranmillis College.
- Mr Lee declared that his wife is employed as a Deputy Head of School at the College.
- The Principal & CEO declared his daughter is employed as a lecturer at the College.

No action was taken in relation to any of the declared conflicts.

### c) Minutes of the F&GP meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024

*Previously issued to all Members.*

**Agreed:** The minutes of the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> November were reviewed, members agreed they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting. The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Derek Wilson and seconded by Majella Corrigan.

### d) F&GP Action Points from meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024

Members noted the action the Acting Director of IT & Finance will present the requested visual graphic for the NDPB report at the next meeting.

## 2) Correspondence:

*Previously issued to all Members.*

### a) SERC Budget Allocation 24-25

The Principal talked to the correspondence and highlighted the 2024/25 approved Resource DEL budget allocation at January Monitoring Stage 1 is £46,107k. Members were asked to note that there had been a reduction of £100k at the request of the College in relation to business services delivery and a further reduction of £983k as the non-teaching pay award had been awarded at a lower level, therefore both adjustments were expected.

## 3) Staffing Items for Information

*Papers previously issued to all Members.*

a) HR Priorities 2024/2025 plan and status updates/HR Key Metrics Report

The Acting Director of HR & Facilities began by advising that 8 targets will be met for 24/25 and 2 are subject to updates from the Department. One is relating to the delivery model, and the other is related to revised pay, conditions and service and collective bargaining, which may now see some progress as CEF has been reformed. The Principal added that it is an encouraging development to see all 6 colleges working together again.

The Acting Director highlighted the ongoing work for priority 1 which is focused on employee relations, she advised that a staff survey will be issued before Easter and a lot of focus was given to the staff briefings about cohesion and relationship building.

Moving onto the key metrics report the Acting Director provided an overview on the recent figures and highlighted that in terms of presenting a workforce planning report she is working alongside the Acting Director of IT & Finance to align the HR and finance reports to ensure there is a more accurate report for the next committee. Members noted that having the accurate headcount and rolling average will allow the College to monitor against budget build and ensure the reform to save scheme cap is not exceeded.

In concluding the report, the Acting Director advised that the absence rates are still above target but there is an improvement in the year-to-date figure.

b) Employee Relations Update

The Acting Director of HR & Facilities outlined a summary of the employee relations cases currently live within the College. Members noted there were 13 investigations ongoing, including 2 legal cases, 4 were carried over from 24/25.

The Acting Director drew attention to how ET1 forms are reported to the committee within this report and advised that when a new form is received this will be specifically highlighted to the committee during discussion.

c) Healthcare Scheme Review

The Committee reviewed the written report presented and the Acting Director provided a detailed background of the Healthcare Scheme in the College. She advised that UK Healthcare were awarded a second contract in 2023 for 1 year with a possible, three optional 1-year extensions, subject to annual review. This 1-year extension is now expiring and there is a need to determine suitability for a further 1-year extension.

She highlighted the benefits for staff and the cost of £1 per week per employee. Based on 842 members throughout the year, the net premium cost to the College was £39,382 (this is a reduction of 3.4% on last year). The total amount of claims paid to college staff for the same period is valued £37,381.63, this equates to a 96% return on SERC investment, i.e., for every £1 spent by the College in premiums UK Healthcare are paying back £0.96.

The Acting Director highlighted the scheme is excellent value for money and is used as a recruitment tool as part of the staff benefits, she added it is evident staff do appreciate and avail of the scheme.

**Agreed:** The committee approved the 1-year extension of the Healthcare scheme on the proposal of Derek Wilson and seconded by Majella Corrigan.

d) Acting Up/Honorarium Payment review

The Acting Director of HR & Facilities began by reminding the committee that the policy states there should be a bi-annual review of any acting up or honorarium payments. She highlighted that there are currently 7 payments covered, 3 honorarium payments and 4 acting up.

Action: The committee requested the next acting up/honorarium payment review includes information when the payment is expected to end and to specify the financial uplift cumulatively.

e) Raising Concerns

Members were asked to review the written report that detailed the number of concerns raised over the last 5 years, the Acting Director of HR & Facilities highlighted that the earlier employee relations report aligned with this data as another route of reporting, along with the formal policy. She specifically highlighted the significant work done by the dignity at work advisors on resolving issues informally before they reach a formal complaint stage.

In response to a question the Acting Director highlighted the process of Raising Concerns, she advised that all staff can easily access the policy and SOP through the 'Learning Engine' app. Any complaints that come through from an employee or from a trade union, a meeting will be arranged with HR staff who will provide advice on the options available to them to resolve or progress the complaint.

Whilst complaints raised under the Raising Concern policy make up the least number of total complaints (23%) it is only complaints of a particular nature and in the public interest that fall into this policy area. Regardless, 23% is not an insignificant proportion of the complaints raised and demonstrates that staff do access this policy.

The Chair commented that it is helpful for the committee to have assurance that there is work being done to promote the various routes for staff, he highlighted that in terms of culture it is essential staff have confidence in the process.

f) Overview of management roles within schools

The Acting Director talked to the written report at 003F that outlines the management roles across the four academic schools detailing the allocation and responsibilities. She highlighted that a communication piece will be done to provide clarity to staff on the roles and responsibilities in each school.

The Deputy Principal Curriculum added that the Deputy Head of School role was part of the previous management structure, and the title of this role will be reviewed, in light of the new Principal Lecturer role, to ensure that it embeds into the new structure with more clarity.

#### 4) Financial Items for Information

*Papers previously issued to all Members.*

##### a) NDPB Budgeting and Forecasting Submission

The Head of Finance talked to the report at 004A and began by advising this return detailed a resource requirement of £46,029k. As per the correspondence discussed at agenda item 2, the Department have made reductions for business services and the NJC pay award therefore the working target is £46,029k, there are therefore no budgetary pressures.

##### b) Period 8 Management Accounts

The Head of Finance talked to the most recent accounts and provided an overview of income and expenditure variances.

##### c) Finance Operational Report

The HoF asked members to note the written report at 004C and highlighted that debt and supplier payment days were both on positive trends. The committee noted that Department of Finance have suggested there will be changes made to procurement limits to ensure there is value for money as the current limits currently exclude a lot of SMEs applying for contracts.

In response to a member's question the HoF set out how the college can work in partnership with industry to procure equipment and training, he highlighted that this can be expensive, and the college actively seeks opportunities to partner with industry to provide a rich student experience.

##### d) Estates & Capital Expenditure Report

The Acting Director of HR & Facilities presented the report at 004D. She provided an overview of the executive summary and in particular talked to the red strategic risk around the renewal of the PSC and TSC frameworks.

Members noted that this is a procurement issue, and the renewal will unfortunately not be completed on time and so it has been elevated as red on the strategic risk register, audit committee will be fully briefed at their meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> January.

#### 5) Health and Safety Update

The Acting Director of HR & Facilities advised that recruitment would begin this week to appoint the SHEQ officer.

An overview was provided to the committee on first aid training that was carried out across the College, high risk areas were initially targeted, and the training will be rolled out to academic staff also.

## 6) Applications and Enrolments

*Paper previously issued to all Members.*

The committee noted the written report in 006, which provided an update on the College applications and enrolment figures, the Deputy Principal Curriculum highlighted the variances in the report and the current enrolment figures.

Full-time enrolments have remained very strong and are currently 4882. This is a marginal increase of 3% on the previous academic year.

The DPC went on to set out how SERC will capitalize on unique programme offerings and reviewing the curriculum offering. Members noted that courses will be retained to ensure that there is a much more efficient offering for staff and students.

## 8) Policies for review

*Papers previously issued to all Members.*

Members noted that policies had been reviewed and there were no substantive changes recommended for approval.

## 9) Any other Business

## 10) Confidential

A separate note was taken for this item.

With no other business being discussed the meeting concluded at 7.30pm