

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE OF THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY HELD AT 10.00 AM ON 9 FEBRUARY 2021 (by zoom)**

**1. PRESENT**

|                |                    |
|----------------|--------------------|
| Mr J Craig     | Sir Gerry Loughran |
| Mrs P Carville | Mr N McCausland    |
| Mr G Doran     | Mr B Mulholland    |
| Rev R Herron   | Mr K Mulvenna      |
| Mr M Johnston  |                    |

Mr P Kavanagh and Mrs G McGrath were in attendance. Both Members were welcomed to their first meeting of the Committee.

**2. IN ATTENDANCE**

Ms S Long, Mrs M Corkey, Mrs C Duffield, Mr D Hanna, Mr S Wade, Ms L McCall and for part of the meeting Mrs D Allen, Mrs S McCartan, Mr M McDermott, and Ms E Patterson.

**3. PROTOCOL FOR EA BLENDED AND REMOTE ATTENDANCE MEETINGS**

All present were observing the protocol.

**4. OFFICE OF CHAIR**

On the proposal of Mr Mulvenna and seconded by Mrs Carville, Mr G Doran was elected Chair of the Committee for the remainder of the term of the current governance structure.

**5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Chair reminded Members of the requirement to declare interests during the course of the meeting.

**6. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 12 JANUARY 2021**

The Committee agreed the minutes\* (FGP/2/21/5) of the meeting held on 12 January 2021 on the proposal of Rev Herron and seconded by Mr McCausland.

**7. MATTER ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

**INTERIM ULSTER SCOTS POLICY AND INTERIM IRISH LANGUAGE POLICY**

It was noted that work was progressing on the two draft interim policies.

**8. CORPORATE BUSINESS PLAN 2020/21 - UPDATE ON QUARTER 3**

Mrs Allen presented quarter 3 of the Corporate Business Plan\* (FGP/2/21/8) which set out EA's corporate objectives and the actions which had been delivered for all three quarters in the current year. She advised that over 75% of all actions had been completed, or were on target for completion, at the end of quarter 3. She also highlighted areas which were on track for completion by the end of March and areas which were likely to be achieved with some delay. The Plan's progress was being monitored through Directorate Management Teams, the Corporate Leadership Team, and quarterly accountability meetings. She advised that the Corporate Business Plan for 2021/22 was currently being developed with the intention that it would be presented to the Committee in April 2021.

Clarification was sought and received on a number of issues. These related to the provision of portable devices to staff to provide for remote working and the arrangements made for staff,

particularly those working in critical services, to return to the office when appropriate in line with Public Health Agency guidance and requirements around social distancing. The continued improvement within Statutory Operations was reported in respect of the timeframe to process statements; 45% of statements had been completed in under 26 weeks by December 2020. In response to a specific query, an update was provided on the number of children whose statements were taking longer than 26 weeks. It was anticipated that the statements for these children would be completed by the end of March. An outline of the arrangements to implement payment of the free school meals allowance and the food summer scheme to families was also provided.

A Member said that the business areas which had been identified as likely to be achieved but with some delay related mainly to SEN services. Officers advised that target dates in this area had been impacted by challenges imposed by Covid-19 around timely engagement and feedback with stakeholder groups, extensions to current consultations, and longer term systemic changes. Mrs Allen said that these issues and actions would be articulated more clearly in the 2021/22 Corporate Business Plan.

On the proposal of Mr Craig, seconded by Mr McCausland, the Committee agreed to recommend the approval of the Corporate Business Plan 2020/21 - Quarter 3.

Ms Long said that Members who had been recently appointed to the Board would receive induction training on the Corporate Business Plan and performance processes.

**Action:** *Mrs Allen to provide induction training to recently appointed Board Members on the Corporate Business Plan and performance processes.*

## **9. OPERATIONS AND ESTATES**

### **9.1 TENDERS AND CONTRACT DOCUMENTS**

In accordance with the Scheme of Delegation and Authorisations, approved by the Board on 26 November 2020, the Committee noted the paper\* (FGP/2/21/9.1) setting out information on tenders and contract awards as approved by the appropriate Director.

It was noted that, in line with the Scheme of Delegation and Authorisations, a new protocol and Scheme for the Committee would be presented for the Committee's consideration in the coming months.

### **9.2 POST PRIMARY ADMISSIONS 2021 - UPDATE**

Mr Hanna presented a paper\* (FGP/2/21/9.2) setting out progress against the timeframe to implement the post primary digital admissions project for September 2021. The paper also set out project risks, mitigating actions, and requirements around a communication plan. It also set out EA's current planning with regard to an anticipated increase in the number of admission appeals. He advised that while confidence in project delivery was green, the entire admissions process had been rated amber due to uncertainties around the admission appeals. Mr Hanna said that this risk had been de-escalated from the Corporate Risk Register to the Directorate Risk Register following decisions by the majority of post primary schools to remove academic selection from their admissions criteria for the September 2021 intake. He said that this risk would continue to be reviewed throughout the process by the Corporate Leadership Team.

Concern was raised in respect of the impact of the current year's admissions process on non-selective post primary schools, including the potential arrangements to be put in place by DE for temporary variations. Mr Hanna drew attention to the support being given by

officers to the DE Admissions Team on temporary variations and said that a decision was yet to be taken by DE on this issue.

Assurance was sought around EA's capacity to meet the needs of an expected increase in the number of admission appeals. Mr Hanna said that officers were working alongside the DE Admissions Team to develop a range of measures to accommodate appeals and on arrangements for parents to trigger an appeal, including timeframes. Members urged caution in any reduction in timeframe that would impact on parents and schools and their ability for appropriate consideration and engagement at relevant stages. It was also highlighted that an increased number of appeals would impact on the level of advice and support provided by principals to parents, particularly within a tighter timeframe. Mr Hanna said that Members' comments would be taken into consideration when he was engaging with the DE Admission Team. He said that further updates would be provided to the Committee throughout the process.

The Committee noted the update on the post primary admissions process for September 2021.

## **10. FINANCE**

### **2020/21 FINANCIAL REPORT - NINE MONTHS ENDING DECEMBER 2020**

Mr Wade presented the financial report\* (FGP/2/21/10.1) including the December MEMR\*. He advised that, during December, DE had notified EA of additional Earmarked funding of £1.523m (for non Covid-19 related pressures) which brought the overall DE Recurrent Budget for 2020/21 to £2.269bn. Based on current information and available assumptions, EA was projecting a break even position at year end. An explanation of this position was provided. Currently, EA was reporting an overall estimated underspend of £5.294m (excluding Earmarked and Youth) which comprised an underspend in the schools' delegated budget of £16.194m and an estimated block grant funding gap of £10.900m (after estimated savings of £17.328m). The break even position took account of an adjustment of approximately £5.5m from resource to capital expenditure in relation to LMS Capital. It also took account of assurances from DE that bids from EA, as part of the January monitoring bid process and Earmarked pressures, would be funded. Information on the bids submitted as part of January monitoring was provided by Mr Wade and these bids were set out in the paper.

Mr Wade advised that £12.690m of savings had been delivered to date (73%) within the savings plan of £17.328m. All savings were being reported as RAG rated green. For the benefit of new Members, Mr Wade outlined the savings accrued by EA since its establishment in 2015, the strategies adopted by EA to realise savings, and the close working relationship with DE colleagues around EA's financial planning. This information would be provided in depth to new Members as part of their induction training.

Mr Wade provided a report on the schools' delegated budget which had not changed from the position reported in the November MEMR. He outlined the Minister's strategy with regard to the allocation of Earmarked funding throughout the year in order to monitor and support schools through Education Restart.

Mr Wade said that the December Capital monitoring return was reporting a pressure within Schools' Capital. He advised that a further bid for capital funding had been submitted to DE and this would also cover portable devices for pupils (Ministerial priority), teacher devices, braille laptops, and other ICT requirements. Based on current assumptions and information available, he said it was anticipated that the remaining Capital allocations for Schools and Youth would be fully spent for 2020/21.

The Committee noted the profiled financial position for 2020/21 which was resulting in an anticipated break even position by year end.

## 11. HUMAN RESOURCES

### 11.1 REVIEW OF EA'S EQUALITY SCHEME

Mrs Duffield said that EA was required to undertake a review of its Equality Scheme every five years. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Equality Commission had agreed to a one year extension to EA's Equality Scheme which had previously been published on 1 October 2015.

Mr McDermott presented a paper\* (FGP/2/21/10.1) which set out the process for reviewing EA's Equality Scheme. The review would involve significant desktop research, a range of engagements with staff around equality screening and training including input from the Staff Equality Forum, workshops with community and voluntary sectors organisations through the Joint Consultative Forum, and engagement with Board Members as part of a workshop, prior to a full public consultation exercise.

Members sought clarity around issues relating to addressing regional variations within the Scheme, stakeholder engagement, and timeframes. Mr McDermott said that the Equality Scheme required EA to produce an Audit of Inequalities and an associated Equality Action Plan. He said that EA's rural obligations would also be embedded into this audit. The engagement to be undertaken with the community and voluntary sectors on reviewing the Scheme would be progressed through the Joint Consultative Forum and work relating to the Audit of Inequalities would be undertaken within the next year. He said that all findings and recommendations would be presented to the Committee for consideration in due course.

A Member requested information on the number of policies that had been approved by EA and the number that had undergone a full EQIA.

The Committee noted the process for reviewing EA's Equality Scheme.

**Action:** *Committee to receive information on the number of policies that have been approved by EA and the number that have undergone full EQIA.*

### 11.2 MENOPAUSE WORKPLACE POLICY

Ms Patterson presented the draft Policy\* (FGP/2/21/10.2) and a summary paper advising that the policy had been based on best practice workplace policies across the UK and developed through engagement with staff, trade unions, and health experts. She said that the development of the Policy was a commitment in EA's Gender Action Plan for 2019-21. Attention was drawn to the arrangements for training and supporting staff and to the consideration that could be given by managers to a range of reasonable adjustments in line with EA's Reasonable Adjustments Guidelines for Managers. An outline of the launch of the policy was also provided.

In response to a Member's query, Ms Patterson said that officers were working with teaching trade unions in order to progress work in schools on raising awareness of the Policy along with plans to work through TNC structures. The Member indicated the need for clear understanding of the Policy for Boards of Governors.

On the proposal of Mrs Carville, seconded by Mr Mulvenna, the Committee agreed to recommend the approval of the Menopause Workplace Policy.

**12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**EA's BUDGET PLANNING EXERCISE FOR 2021/22**

A Member queried the strategy to be adopted when planning for EA's 2021/22 initial budget plan. He asked for Members to receive a report on the issues that should be taken into consideration during this financial planning exercise. He also asked for an update on the collaboration taking place with DE officials with regard to next year's financial planning.

Mr Wade outlined the context within which officers were engaging with DE colleagues on the financial planning for schools and EA for 2021/22. He outlined the challenges with regard to financial planning, specifically in respect of the annual accounting system, the surrender of recurrent funding, and recurring pay awards. He referred to work on planning for efficiencies and the consideration being given to areas requiring investment. He also referenced the work of the Transformation and Financial Recovery Programme.

Mr Wade said that a Board Member workshop would be held in due course to give consideration to EA's initial budget plan for 2021/22.

**13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on 9 March 2021.

The meeting ended at 11.22 am.

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Chair

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Date

\* Paper circulated with the agenda