

CCEA

COUNCIL

Minutes of the one hundred and sixty-second meeting of Council held on Thursday 30 November 2023 at 3pm via hybrid arrangements (convened in Room 115).

Present: Mr T O'Reilly (Chair) Mrs K O'Hare
Mr B Wilson Mr H McCarthy
Professor P Hanna Mrs P Leitch
Ms P Slevin Mrs A Kingsley
Mrs D O'Connor Dr L Caul

Executive

Mr G Campbell (Chief Executive)
Mrs L Scott (Director of Finance & Corporate Services)
Mrs C Latham (Interim Director of Curriculum & Assessment)
Mr M Crossan (Temporary Director of Examinations)
Mrs S King (Head of Regulation)
Mr J Daly (Business Manager Financial Services)

Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)

In Attendance

Mr R Caldwell (DE Observer)
Mrs V Leyden (Boardroom Apprentice)

Introduction

The Chair welcomed members and officers to the meeting.

Apologies

No apologies were received.

Conflict of Interests

Members confirmed there were no conflicts of interest on any of the agenda items for this meeting.

Chair's Business

Correspondence

The Chair referred members to the range of council correspondence received since the previous meeting. Members noted the correspondence from the previous meeting.

The Chair and CEO advised that a draft response for RSE would be brought back to Council for comment before being issued.

A Council Member commented on the increased quantity of correspondence between the Department of Education and CCEA regarding Vocational Qualifications and expressed concern over a move away from skilled qualifications.

The CEO advised that CCEA were currently engaging with the Department for the Economy (DfE) regarding funding arrangements and had highlighted the challenges in operating under the existing funding arrangements where budgets were agreed on an annual basis. He also highlighted discussions surrounding the promotion of some vocational qualifications as being equivalent to GCSEs. He highlighted the challenges that exist in respect of determining such VQs as equivalent qualifications. Members concurred that we need accessible, skills based, fit for purpose qualifications for young people who are not following the academic route. The Chair recognised that this was a significant issue and suggested a workshop with representatives from DfE to discuss the issue.

A Council Member wished to place on record that the CAT discussions need to continue at Committee and Council. The Chair recognised the importance of this and advised that he intended to arrange a date in the new year so that discussions would continue.

Interim Council Arrangements & Recruitment Update

C/162/1

Recruitment Update

The Chair advised on progress with the recruitment of new Council Members. He informed members that final interviews were completed and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is expected to receive the submissions before Christmas. He also informed members that he intended to write to the Department in the New Year highlighting the need for a further recruitment process in 2024 and to argue for an increase in council membership numbers potentially up to sixteen or seventeen members.

The Chair asked members to consider and approve the following proposals:

1. Meetings of the Education Committee and Regulation Committee, scheduled for January 2024, be postponed and that any urgent business required to be conducted be brought to Council meetings scheduled for January and February 2024. The Chairs of both committees have agreed this approach.
2. The meeting of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee scheduled for 14 December 2023 be postponed both because there is a Chair vacancy. The Chief Executive, as Accounting Officer, is content with this approach.
3. The Finance Committee is a statutory committee, and it must continue to meet in accordance with the legislation. The schedule will continue until March 2024.
4. Several items have been identified for Council to consider in greater depth. Workshops are proposed in both January and February to consider Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT), the Corporate Plan, and relationships with the Department for the Economy.
5. A workshop is planned for the 11 January at 3pm for Council members to view the CAT software and to explore some of the issues delaying its roll-out. This workshop replaces the scheduled meeting of the Education Committee and is open to all Council members.
6. A workshop is also planned for Thursday 29 February 2024 to discuss the Council's approach to the Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum in Northern Ireland. This is an important issue and officers are currently working on advice for Council.

These proposals were proposed by Mrs A Kingsley and seconded by Dr L Caul.

The CEO drew attention to the detail of the report and updated members on the following:

The CEO advised that a budget and business planning session has been arranged for 6 December with senior officials and DE. He advised that additional financial resources had been provided for the summer series.

The CEO informed that there had been ongoing engagement with local political parties and that the Chair and CEO would plan to meet with the Minister as soon as possible after the Assembly was back in function.

Ratification of Council Minutes

Council Meeting held on 28 September 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 28 September 2023 were formally proposed by Dr L Caul and seconded by Mrs K O'Hare as a true and accurate record.

Council Briefing held on 26 October 2023

The minutes of the briefing held on Thursday 26 October 2023 were formally proposed by Mrs P Leitch and seconded by Mrs A Kingsley as a true and accurate record.

Copies would be made available for the Chair to sign.

Action points: The Chair drew attention to the status of the action points and advised that training on new partnership arrangements and discussions with DE would be progressed once new members come on board.

Education

Chair's Report: Education Committee on 10 October 2023

The Chair of the Education Committee confirmed that the Department of Education (DE) had engaged with CCEA to progress the CAT matter and that this would be discussed in detail on 11 January 2024.

The Chair thanked the staff who supported the Education Committee.

Report on Summer 2023 Examinations Series

The temporary Director of Examinations provided an overview of the detail of the paper and drew attention to the actions being taken to address the challenges. He provided an overview of the component parts of the paper including special consideration and how this is taken forward to award grades for those candidates who are unable to sit examinations due to severe medical conditions.

A Council Member commended the qualifications team on how they accommodated centres and wished to place on record her thanks to the staff.

Curriculum & Assessment Update

C/162/4

The Interim Director of Curriculum and Assessment (IDoCA) drew attention to the detail of the paper and was pleased to report that the Fair Start initiative was moving at pace and well received. She informed members that invitations had been issued, with a 50% uptake on attending. Invitations will be issued to Post Primary colleagues next year.

The IDoCA wished to place on record her thanks to members of the Irish Medium team for the work carried out in that area.

Members were content with information provided.

Finance

Chair's report on Finance Committee: 23 November 2023

The Chair gave a high-level summary of the items discussed at the Finance Committee held on 23 November 2023. He referred to the update from Resources on the initiatives underway across the organisation.

Finance Report as at 30 September 2023

C/162/5

The Director of Finance and Corporate Services (DoFCS) drew attention to the detail of the paper provided and reported an underspend of 0.2% at this time. It has been considered in detail by the Finance Committee.

She also advised that the October position is underspent by 160K and will allow Council to remain within the maximum 1% underspend threshold. This is being managed and monitored by the Financial Services Manager (FSM) and his team.

The DoFCS also reported that earmarked funding had been received in relation to RSE and welcomed this additional support.

2023/24 Savings Plan Update as at 30 September 2023

C/162/6

The DoFCS drew attention to the detail provided and was pleased to report that progress against the savings plan was broadly on track. The DoFCS identified two areas that require further mitigation. These were general vacancy control (recyclables) and the closure of the William Ritchie Building.

A Council Member commended the team for the significant amount of work in achieving this position and congratulated the senior team.

Business Plan Mid-Year (Quarter Two) Monitoring Report

C/162/7

The FSM drew attention to the detail of the information provided and gave some background to the process. He reported on the position as at 30 September and provided clarity on those items which required further information.

Regulation

Chair's Report to Council on Regulation Committee 6 November

The Chair of the Committee gave a high-level report on the items discussed at the Regulation Committee held on 6 November 2023. It was noted that the Regulation committee had been stood down for the January meeting and any items requiring discussion/approval would go forward to Council.

A Council Member commended the efforts of the Head of Regulation and her team and the relationship between DE and DfE in taking forward this issue.

Any Other Business

None identified.

Below the Line Business

Members noted the Finance Committee minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2023.

Date of Next Meeting

The Chair thanked members and officers for their input into the meeting.

The next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 25 January 2024 at 1.30 pm. The Corporate Planning workshop arrangements would be confirmed in due course.