

**MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTH MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE OF THE ARMAGH OBSERVATORY AND PLANETARIUM HELD ON 10 DECEMBER 2018 AT 11.00 A.M. IN THE KEPLER ROOM**

**Present:** Mr J Briggs (Chair), Mr B Hannam, Professor R Oudmaijer (via Skype), Professor L Harra, Dr M McKay, Mr P McGurgan, Professor T Ray

**Apologies:** Mr S Brown, Professor M Merrifield, Canon Hilliard and Professor M Mathioudakis

**In attendance:** Professor M Burton (Director), Mrs C Corvan (Head of Corporate Services), Dr M Sarzi (Head of Research), Mr L Knox (Head of Finance), Mrs D Neill (Operations Manager), Mrs L Brown (Observer)

**1. APOLOGIES**

1.1 Apologies were recorded as above.

1.2 The Chair welcomed Professor Oudmaijer via Skype and Mrs Lynne Brown to the meeting. The Committee noted that Mrs Neill was returning to Tourism NI and Mrs Brown would commence employment with Armagh Observatory and Planetarium (AOP) as permanent Corporate Manager from 7<sup>th</sup> January 2019. The Committee thanked Mrs Neill for providing an excellent secretariat service to the Committee during her temporary secondment to AOP.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

2.1 The Chair reminded members and officers of the need to declare any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest associated with any item on the Agenda either now or at the relevant stage during the meeting.

**3. MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18 SEPTEMBER 2018**

3.1 The minutes of the meeting of 18 September 2018 were reviewed and approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.

**4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

4.1 The Chair invited Professor Ray to update the Committee regarding the matter in relation to the resignation of the ICT officer. Professor Ray informed the Committee that as a result of his investigations he was satisfied that there was no issue of concern for the Management Committee.

4.2 Dr McKay advised the Committee that he and Professor Burton would endeavour to progress the matter relating to the exhibits.

4.3 The Committee had no further issues to raise and noted the completion of two of the matters previously arising.

**5. CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

- 5.1 The Chair advised the Committee that there would be a presentation from Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Committee at 12.30 pm in relation to the Armagh Leisure Village proposals.
- 5.2 The Chair reminded the Committee that they had previously discussed the need to set up a steering group and it was important to consider how to take forward engagement with the Council. A paper would be brought to the March 2019 meeting. **Action 10/12/2018 – 01 The Chair to prepare a paper for the March 2019 meeting.**
- 5.3 Mr Hannam informed the Committee that the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) was advising both the Council and AOP and as a member of SIB, wished to declare an interest. The Chair and Committee were content that Mr Hannam could remain for the presentation.
- 5.4 The Chair reported to the Committee that the previously circulated proposed dates for meetings in 2019 were now confirmed.
- 5.5 Professor Harra informed the Committee that the term of appointment for Mr McGurgan, Mr Brown and herself had been extended for 6 months but that this would run out in March 2019. Mrs Corvan stated that she had been advised by DfC that legal advice was being sought in relation to public appointments and it was hoped there may be more clarity in the New Year.

**6. REPORT FROM DIRECTOR**

- 6.1 Professor Burton elaborated on the matters for discussion. The Committee noted the matters and some of these were discussed in detail.
- 6.2 In relation to the budgetary situation, Mr Knox provided the Committee with sight of a work in progress paper and explained its content. The Committee was informed that AOP was continuing to liaise with DfC to address core funding, but in the absence of a Minister core budgets could not be changed. Professor Oudmaijer commented that the salary budget was larger than the core budget.
- 6.3 Mrs Corvan stated that on a positive note the Department were working positively with AOP and AOP hoped this would resolve the issue.
- 6.4 The Chair stated that AOP accepted that there would be a 4% cut, however, AOP needed to have a core budget established. The Department had recognised this fact, AOP was properly articulating its situation and doing what the Department required to demonstrate that AOP's governance was good and financial systems were sound.
- 6.5 Professor Harra enquired as to what impact this had on students. Mr Knox advised that AOP planned to continue funding students. Mrs Corvan explained that AOP had set a target to have 12 students in place by 2021 as this is an important factor in maintaining a vibrant student body.
- 6.6 In relation to future events, the Chair commented on the events listed and the tremendous opportunity to show that AOP was engaged with the Council and encouraged AOP to continue to pursue funding. Dr McKay also commented on the importance of the events and stated his support for AOP's plans. The Chair thanked Professor Burton for the work in relation to the events and funding proposals.

- 6.7 Professor Burton requested the Committee's input in relation to the requirement for a critical mass of researchers as it was difficult for this to be understood outside universities. There was discussion about ways of doing this including conducting a comparative survey with other small, medium and large institutions. Professor Harra suggested that the emphasis of the paper should be selling the benefits of research and emphasising outcomes. The Chair suggested that as this issue was critical to AOP that there should be a permanent item on the agenda in relation to research and how this can be improved. Mrs Corvan suggested that this could be included as an informal session after lunch for the March meeting. **Action MC 10/12/2018 – 02 Research is to be included as a permanent item on the Agenda**
- 6.8 The Committee noted the other matters included in the Director's report. The Chair asked if the members were content to accept the Director's report and this was confirmed.

## **7. UPDATE FROM THE AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE (ARAC)**

- 7.1 Mr Hannam informed the Committee that Internal Audit had completed an audit on procurement which resulted in a satisfactory rating. There had been substantial improvement in procurement processes.
- 7.2 Mr Hannam advised the Committee that the two key risks in the Risk Register had been considered in the Director's report which were the replacement of the Digistar and management of the Heritage Assets. The ARAC considered that the assessment was appropriate.
- 7.3 Mr Hannam reported to the Committee that the Annual Report and Accounts 2017/18 would be qualified due to the lack of valuation of Heritage Assets. However, there were no other issues and the auditors had commented on the improvement and quality of the Annual Reports.
- 7.4 Mr Hannam explained to the Committee that in relation to the RTTCWG the issue that led to the qualification, Heritage Assets, was currently a matter for discussion between AOP and the audit office to determine whether a change of accounting policy on Heritage Assets would be acceptable by NIAO in order to avoid a similar qualification in future years.
- 7.5 Mr Hannam advised that ARAC had considered 8 policy papers and was content that the Management Committee formally endorse these.
- 7.6 The Management Committee accepted the audit reports and approved the Risk Register, Annual Report and Accounts, the RTTCWG and Policies.

## **8. UPDATE FROM THE STAFFING POLICY AND REMUNERATION COMMITTEE (SPRC)**

- 8.1 Professor Ray provided a summary of the matters discussed at the SPRC. The Corporate Manager post had been filled and the postholder would commence in January 2019. The other substantive issue is the regrading of a post which was ongoing but should be sorted out shortly.
- 8.2 Professor Ray informed the Committee that under the Employee Special Bonus Scheme the committee recommend approval of a proposal to pay two staff members special bonus.
- 8.3 Professor Ray advised that the SPRC had approved the updates to the Equal Opportunities Policy, the Grievance, Disciplinary, and Dignity at Work policies.

- 8.4 The final update provided by Professor Ray was that that a business case had been forwarded to DfC in relation to the Voluntary Exit Scheme.
- 8.5 The Chair asked if the Committee were content to accept the report and approve the recommendations from the SPRC and this was confirmed.

**9. PERFORMANCE AGAINST BUSINESS PLAN - KPIs and Finance**

- 9.1 The Committee noted the papers.

**10. AOB**

- 10.1 The Committee noted the availability of training.

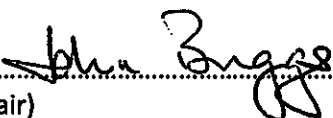
**11. DATES OF THE NEXT MEETINGS**

Meetings for 2019 were agreed as  
26<sup>th</sup> March,  
24<sup>th</sup> June,  
23<sup>rd</sup> September, and  
16<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

The meeting concluded at 12.25pm

At the conclusion of the meeting the Chair welcomed Mr Ken Geary of Ostick and Williams, representing Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council. Mr Geary outlined council proposals for an Armagh Leisure Village and impact on AOP land. A number of meetings are planned going forward to progress in more detail. The Chair agreed to provide regular update reports to Management Committee members via email to keep them updated prior to the March 2019 meeting.

Signed as a true record of the meeting

  
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(Chair)

Dated:

## Updated Actions as at 10 December 2018

Reference	Action	Owner	Progress
MC29/01/15 - 01	Dr McKay to explore within ESA if exhibits could be provided to the Planetarium	Dr McKay	<p><b>Ongoing</b></p> <p><b>21 June 2018</b> Dr McKay advised that he has been unable to progress this due to his contact being on exceptional leave. He will endeavour to resolve this before his retirement.</p> <p><b>17 November 2017</b> Continuing to explore opportunities with Dr McKay</p> <p><b>1 September 2017</b> Dr McKay advised that he will introduce Mr News to the ESA PR.</p> <p><b>23 August 2017</b> John News has been appointed as temporary HECO and will pursue this matter with Dr McKay</p> <p><b>29 March 2017:</b> It is hoped that a temporary Head of Education &amp; Outreach will be appointed shortly and this matter will be pursued at this time.</p> <p><b>20 September 2016:</b> Dr McKay has spoken to ESA PR in HQ (Paris). ESA would like to understand the direction AOP intends to follow and what support they could provide. It has been decided to wait until the new Head of Education &amp; Outreach is appointed before pursuing further.</p> <p><b>28 January 2016:</b> Dr McKay to introduce Planetarium representative to the ESA teams to pursue potential exhibits.</p>
MC21/06/18-01	The Chair and DfC to discuss timing of confirmation of extensions	Chair/DfC	<p><b>Ongoing</b></p> <p><b>10 September 2018</b> DfC advised that the process is underway to reappoint 3 members. There are no plans to appoint a replacement for Primrose Wilson in the absence of a Minister.</p>
MC 19/09/2018-01	AOP to consider procurement of specialised conference call equipment.	Mrs Corvan	<p><b>Completed</b></p> <p><b>28 November 2018:</b> A bid was made to upgrade conference facilities at AOP. This has been successful and will include upgrade of conference call facilities.</p>
MC 19/09/2018-02	Professor Ray to investigate on behalf of and report back to the Management Committee in relation to the ICT matter.	Professor Ray	<p><b>Propose to Close</b></p> <p>Professor Ray to report during December meeting</p>
MC 19/09/2018-03	The Chair to take forward the appointment of a qualified accountant to the Committee with DfC	Chair/DfC	<p><b>Ongoing</b></p> <p>Discussions have taken place between DfC, the Chair of the Board of Governors and the Chair of the Management Committee in relation to Committee vacancies.</p>