



**MINUTES OF THE PEOPLE, FINANCE AND ORGANISATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE HELD AT 9.30AM ON THURSDAY  
24 NOVEMBER 2022 VIA ZOOM**

**PRESENT:** Mr T Haslett Committee Chair  
Ms N Lappin Non-Executive Director

**IN**

**ATTENDANCE:** Mr M Bloomfield Chief Executive (left the meeting at 11.30am)  
Ms M Lemon Director of HR & OD (joined the meeting at 9.15am)  
Mr P Nicholson Director of Finance, Procurement, Fleet & Estates  
Ms M Paterson Director of Planning, Performance & Corporate Services (left the meeting at 11.30am)  
Mrs C Mooney Board Secretary  
Ms L Gardner Asst Director HR  
Ms V Cochrane Asst Director HR (joined the meeting at 9.10am)  
Mr J Wilson Boardroom Apprentice  
Ms S Young HR Associate (for agenda item 10 only)  
Ms P Larkin Senior HR Advisor (for agenda item 10 only)

**APOLOGIES:** Mr J Dennison Non-Executive Director

**1 Apologies & Opening Remarks**

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting and extended his congratulations to Mr Nicholson on his recent appointment as the Trust's Director of Finance, Procurement, Finance and Estates.

The Chair also extended a welcome to Mr David Mullan, who had recently taken up post as Senior HR Manager and who would be

observing today's meeting), Mr Jamie Wilson, Boardroom Apprentice, and Mr Tim Craig, Project Accountant, Finance.

## 2 **Procedure**

### 2.1 **Declaration of Potential Conflicts of Interest**

The Chair asked those present to declare any potential conflicts of interest now or as the meeting progressed.

### 2.2 **Quorum**

The Chair confirmed the Committee as quorate.

### 2.3 **Confidentiality of Information**

The Chair emphasised the confidentiality of information.

## 3 **Previous Minutes (PC24/11/22/01)**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 September 2022 were approved on a proposal from Ms Lappin and seconded by the Chair.

## 4 **Matters Arising (PC24/11/22/02)**

Members **NOTED** the actions points.

## 5 **Finance Update (PC24/11/22/03)**

Mr Nicholson commenced his report by advising the Committee that, while the Trust was projecting a breakeven position at year end, there were a few assumptions within the breakeven projection.

Mr Nicholson indicated that the current Resource Revenue Limit (RRL) was just below £100 million, of which £96 million was recurrent. He pointed out that ring-fenced allocations of £11.5 million related to Covid-19 as well as workforce and service delivery and were subject to business case approval.

Continuing, Mr Nicholson advised that an allocation of £3.6 million in respect of Cohort 4 and demography had been assumed and said

this too would be subject to business case approval. He confirmed that £1.2 million in respect of PPE had been received by the Trust.

Mr Nicholson clarified that the pay award for the current year and the PSNI holiday pay had not been included in these figures. He advised that the position on holiday pay was constantly under review, both within the Trust and on a regional basis, and said members would recall the accrual versus provision discussions which had led to the qualification of the Trust's accounts.

Mr Nicholson indicated that it was likely the position would change in the current year and accounting treatment would move to a provision. He explained that this was due in a large part to the uncertainty over the timing of any agreement. Mr Nicholson advised that the effect in year would be to reduce the Trust's expenditure which would be matched by a reduction in RRL so this would not have any impact on the current year's breakeven position. However, he acknowledged that it would create a financial pressure across HSC when the matter was finally resolved.

Continuing, Mr Nicholson indicated that the Trust's provision would increase by £8 million. He said that, while he had been content with the rationale for the position taken by the Trust over the last number of years, as well as being content with the direction of travel in the current year, it had been regrettable that the Trust's accounts had been qualified. Mr Nicholson said that moving from an accrual to a provision would bring the Trust in line with the NIAO position. He explained that it was likely the Trust would have its accounts qualified in the 2022-23 year as the NIAO considered the prior year position.

Ms Lappin said it was unfortunate, because of the Trust's size and budget, that it had been the only Trust to have its accounts qualified due to the holiday pay issue. She expressed her disappointment at the possibility that the current year's accounts would be qualified.

Mr Haslett acknowledged that the issue of holiday pay had been in existence for some time and asked Mr Bloomfield for his view as the Trust's Accounting Officer.

Mr Bloomfield acknowledged that he was not comfortable with the qualification of the Trust's accounts. He said that, in previous years, the Trust had been guided by DoH colleagues taking cognisance of

the need to adhere to a consistent regional approach and said Trust officers would liaise closely with DoH colleagues to explore potential avenues to avoid a qualification.

Referring to savings, Mr Nicholson advised that the Trust's savings target of £2.6 million would be met in-year through non-recurrent measures and additional support from the DoH. He explained that there were regional initiatives to deliver £15 million of savings on agency staff and the Trust had been given an indicative target of £379,000 in this area.

Mr Nicholson turned to the capital programme and advised that the Trust had confirmed resources of £6.1 million with proposed schemes currently totalling £0.3 million over available resources. He drew members' attention to the detailed breakdown of the individual schemes within the report.

Mr Nicholson advised that, of the total £6.1 million, only £0.25 million had been spent at month 6. However, he said he envisaged large schemes and expenditure towards the end of the year with around £2 million profiled over Christmas and £4 million in February and March. Mr Nicholson said that Trust officers were continually reviewing the position. He pointed out that the benefit of securing capital cover at the start of the year meant that vehicle chassis had been ordered for a number of months now. He added that the Trust had received a number of assurances from suppliers that the chassis would be delivered by the end of the financial year.

As well as the vehicle chassis, Mr Nicholson indicated that there were also a number of notable capital schemes included within the capital programme such as the Downpatrick modular building and a number of IT schemes around telephony and the Integrated Command and Control System (ICCS) as well as plans to replace the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) in the Emergency Control.

Mr Haslett expressed his concern at the significant capital expenditure late in the financial year.

Mr Nicholson noted that the Trust's reliance on VAS/PAS remained significant. He drew members' attention to the paper which showed expenditure across four financial years along with a breakdown by supplier for the current year. Mr Nicholson explained that this expenditure was only affordable with the additional resources

provided to the Trust through Covid-19 allocations which could potentially cease at the end of the financial year.

Mr Haslett noted that the Covid-19 allocations had continued in the past despite the DoH indicating that they would cease.

Mr Bloomfield advised that Mr Nicholson had, on a number of occasions, expressed his uncertainty at the continuation of Covid-19 funding this year and he reminded the meeting that the Trust used these resources to cover the costs associated with VAS/PAS. Mr Bloomfield said he welcomed confirmation of the continued Covid-19 allocations up until 31 March 2023 and assured members that the Trust would not continue to rely on this funding as it approached the 2023-24 year.

Continuing, Mr Bloomfield acknowledged the work to be undertaken that would allow the Trust follow a trajectory which would result in a significant reduction in the use of VAS/PAS going into the 2023-24 year.

Ms Lappin suggested that it would be helpful for the Committee to have sight of the Trust plans to reduce VAS/PAS expenditure over the coming months including where these plans might impact services. She questioned whether it would be appropriate for the PFOD Committee to monitor expenditure against VAS/PAS.

Mr Bloomfield stressed the importance of having a planned trajectory. He said that this would be closely linked to the PCS improvement work where it was necessary to have improvement in efficiency and productivity in order to offset the reduction in VAS/PAS. He acknowledged that initial results were positive.

Responding to Ms Lappin's point, Mr Bloomfield acknowledged that the reduction in VAS/PAS expenditure would be significant and reiterated the importance of addressing this in a planned manner. He referred to the slight reduction in expenditure on VAS/PAS and believed that this may have been due to the uncertainty around funding. However, given the likely pressures over the winter period, Mr Bloomfield said it was likely that the Committee would see the Trust's use of VAS/PAS increase.

Ms Lappin acknowledged this point and the current pressures but reminded the meeting of the Trust Board's recommendation to reduce VAS/PAS expenditure.

Mr Haslett suggested that this was an issue that would likely be discussed at the December Trust Board.

Continuing his report, Mr Nicholson advised that expenditure in respect of staff substitution from the Association of Ambulance Chief Executives (AACE) totalled £63,000 in the current year and explained that AACE had provided expert support across a range of mainly operational areas.

Referring to the use of HSC Leadership Associates, Mr Nicholson explained that the nature of support provided was around paramedic training, HR related issues and SAIs. He pointed out that expenditure had been £17,000 for the six months of this year and pointed out that the Trust was currently following up on further invoices from the BSO.

Ms Lemon acknowledged that this issue had been discussed previously and said she was conscious that more detail was required by the Committee, for example a brief description of the work being undertaken and the expected outcomes of that work and expenditure.

Ms Lappin said she would welcome this detail.

Mr Nicholson alluded to the use of agency staff and reported that, in the last financial year, the HSC had spent a total of £320 million, between contracted and non-contracted agencies. He pointed out that £242,000 (75%) had been spent on Nursing and Medical and Dental and he drew members' attention to the NIAS expenditure on agency staff on page 13 of the report.

Mr Nicholson explained that there was no difference for the NIAS in the costs for contracted and non-contracted agencies. He indicated that savings for the NIAS were indicative at this stage and any move would not necessarily release savings. However, he pointed out that the Trust was expecting a reduction in the use of Agency Support Services as the volume of cleaning decreases. Mr Nicholson advised that this may be accompanied by a reduction in

Covid-19 allocations as all these resources were ring-fenced and could only be used for these purposes.

Ms Cochrane referred to the Agency Framework and said she would liaise with Ms Heaslip in relation to a breakdown of the off-contract agency costs.

Ms Lemon reminded members that agency utilisation and expenditure was reported on within the balanced scorecard and believed this was one benefit of having Finance and HR reported together at the same Committee.

Ms Lappin believed that it also demonstrated the benefit of having a Trust Resources Committee and acknowledged the significant expenditure on staff. She welcomed the focus on agency spend and believed the Trust was in a good position moving forward.

The Chair thanked Mr Nicholson for his report which was **NOTED** by members.

## **6 Collaborative Planning tool – demonstration (PC24/11/22/04)**

The Chair welcomed Mr Tim Craig, Project Accountant, Finance Directorate, to the meeting.

By way of introduction, Mr Nicholson explained that the HSC had an integrated Finance, Procurement and Logistics system known as FPL. He advised that the budget module of this system was known as Collaborative Planning (CP) and was the portal used by budget holders to review financial information.

At the Chair's invitation, Mr Craig demonstrated the system for members and said that CP was used by financial management to build budgets and pulled together payroll and non-pay budgets and expenditure in one area. He pointed out that all figures then subsequently flowed through to the Trust's monitoring returns which were submitted to the DoH and presented to Trust Board.

Mr Craig advised that Finance was currently relaunching CP and would be delivering a range of training and scheduling meetings with Directors and budget holders to place the Trust on a firm footing in terms of financial management in the coming challenging financial years.

The Chair asked how much the system was used throughout the Trust.

Responding, Mr Craig explained that arrangements had been made to relaunch the CP tool and Directors' access had been reissued as well as issuing a navigation guide to the system. He added that arrangements had also been put in place to recommence the monthly review of financial performance with Directors.

Ms Lappin welcomed this work and suggested that it would be helpful for the Committee to hear from Directors as to how comfortable Directors felt in using the CP tool and how they used it to manage their budgets as opposed to utilising it for budget spend. She added that it would also be helpful to hear whether Directors felt they now had a degree of ownership over their respective budgets. Ms Lappin expressed concern that there had not been regular meetings with Directors in relation to Directorate budgets and said she would appreciate an update on this.

Ms Paterson said she welcomed the refocus on the CP and added that she had found it a useful tool when she had used it in a previous role. She acknowledged that, during Covid-19, the use of the CP tool had been deprioritised and the Director of Finance had assumed the reporting and managing of budgets. However, she welcomed the refresher training and working with Finance colleagues to recommence the regular meetings with the aim of refocusing Directors' efforts in supporting the management of their respective budgets.

At Ms Lappin's suggestion, Ms Paterson agreed to report back to the February Committee on how she had found the refresher training and how the CP tool had assisted her in the management of her Directorate budget.

Ms Lappin said she would also be interested in hearing from Directors as to any challenges they encountered in their use of the system.

The Chair agreed with the points suggested by Ms Lappin and said he looked forward to Ms Paterson's feedback. He suggested that the use of the CP tool by Directors would allow the Director of



Finance to focus on his responsibilities and allow Directors to consider their Directorate expenditure.

Mr Nicholson thanked Mr Craig for his demonstration of the system and reiterated that the one system was in use across the HSC and was used for monthly monitoring returns and Final Accounts for example. He acknowledged that, during the pandemic, there had been definite changes in the financial management regime with a focus on 'getting things done' in the knowledge that the funding would follow.

However, with the relaunch of the CP tool, Mr Nicholson said that training would be offered to relevant staff and meetings scheduled with Directors and budget holders to get the Trust on a firm footing for the financial challenges ahead. He reminded members that Covid-19 allocations were not guaranteed beyond 31 March 2023.

Mr Bloomfield referred to discussion at the Senior Management Team and said the CP tool would allow Directors, when making the case for the recruitment of posts, for example, to confirm they had the necessary funding within their Directorate budgets. Mr Bloomfield said it would be important to reach a position where Directors had discretion to apply their budget while at the same time ensuring there was appropriate monitoring of expenditure to allow the transfer of resources to areas which might use them more effectively. He believed that the regular meetings between Directors and the Finance Directorate would be key in doing so, with SMT also having appropriate oversight.

Ms Lappin expressed her agreement with Mr Bloomfield's final point and pointed out that the ultimate responsibility lay with the Director of Finance. She indicated that she did not wish any comments she had made to be seen as a dilution of the responsibilities of the Director of Finance and agreed that, while Directors would manage their respective budgets, the overall responsibility lay with Mr Nicholson as Director of Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the demonstration of the CP tool by Mr Craig.

## **7 Clinical Education Plan Monitoring and Reporting** **(PC24/11/22/05)**

The Chair noted that Mr Sinclair was unable to attend the Committee to update members but that Mr Bloomfield would do so in his absence.

Mr Bloomfield explained out that this report would have been regularly presented to the former Assurance Committee. However, he said, it was more appropriate for the PFOD Committee to receive the updates as they related to the supply of clinical staff. Mr Bloomfield referred to the update which provided details of the planned timetable for clinical recruitment and training.

Ms Lemon advised members that the Strategic Review of Clinical Education was a standing item on the Trust's Safety Committee. She assured members that, while the Clinical Education Plan Monitoring and Reporting gave details of the technical elements, other programmes were taking place using different methodologies in relation to identifying training needs, focussing on education rather than training as well as the culture of education and training and how that was delivered. She cited the example of engagement sessions with staff.

Ms Lappin referred to training for EMTs and ACPs and commented that, over the last number of years, the AAP courses had been running back-to-back. She expressed some concern that the AAP 14 course had completed in October but that the next AAP course would not commence until June 2023.

Mr Bloomfield explained that the main reason for adopting a rapid approach had been to replace those EMTs who had undertaken the Foundation Degree. He pointed out that, at any point in time, the Trust had 48 EMTs undertaking the Foundation Degree. Mr Bloomfield advised that the EMTs qualified in October and explained that they had backfilled the students who had graduated at the end of the year to become paramedics.

Continuing, Mr Bloomfield advised that, until the Trust received the CRM funding which would allow the Trust to increase the number of EMTs, the Trust would not be in a position to run the AAP courses as frequently because backfill for the Foundation Degree was not required. He said that the Trust would adopt the same approach for

normal staff turnover and emphasised that there would be no risk to the June course. He added that this also provided an opportunity to review the course content in the interim.

Mr Nicholson alluded to the significant output from the training school over the last four years with the transition to the Foundation Degree and more recently the introduction of the BSc programme. He said he hoped members could see the linkages between the Finance Report in that the Trust would be completing the Paramedic Cohort 4 course. He acknowledged the deferment of the AAP course to June 2023 and referred to the £2.4 million. Mr Nicholson confirmed that the Trust had delivered on that programme of training and advised that the next tranche would be delivered through CRM. He pointed out that CCE/PP training had been scheduled and would be delivered in the current year and acknowledged the challenges associated with this in terms of the release of clinical staff to attend.

Following this discussion, the Committee **NOTED** the Clinical Education Plan Monitoring and Reporting as presented by Mr Bloomfield.

## **8 HR & OD Scorecard and Monitoring Dashboard (PC24/11/22/06)**

Introducing this agenda item, Ms Lemon reminded members that, while she hoped progress was evident, this remained work in progress. She thanked the Trust's Information Team for producing the dashboard. Ms Lemon asked Ms Cochrane and Ms Gardner to highlight the key points from the Scorecard.

Ms Cochrane alluded to the absence information and suggested it might be helpful to include some cumulative figures around percentage and costs in absence in order to give members a sense of the direction of travel. She added that this information was also reported to Trust Board. Moving forward, Ms Cochrane advised that the detail pertaining to agency costs would also be populated.

Ms Cochrane advised that there had been little change in relation to staffing numbers and she said that, as structures were reviewed and embedded, there was less reliance on temporary, acting up and agency posts.

Ms Gardner drew members' attention to the information around complaints and the fact that the KPI related to compliance with the procedure. She explained that when consideration was given to the data being produced, it became clear that there was a need to revisit this KPI as it may not have given the Committee the required assurance.

Ms Gardner explained that, within the complaints section, figures were provided relating to the number of open cases as at the end of September as well as the number of cases closed within that period. She acknowledged the challenge in terms of including the information on the scorecard and suggested the inclusion of information relating to Industrial Tribunals. She informed the meeting that there were currently six Industrial Tribunals ongoing with two in early conciliatory stage.

Ms Lemon advised that a more detailed report on complaints would be brought to the February meeting. She reminded members that the HR Scorecard provided high level information, providing members with the opportunity to explore the information behind the high level figures in greater detail and examine potential themes and trends.

Continuing, Ms Lemon referred to legacy cases and said the Trust was working with TU colleagues to ensure a pragmatic approach to closing such cases.

She referred to the HR Improvement Plan and noted the appointment of Mr David Mullan as Senior Workforce Manager within the HR Directorate. Ms Lemon advised that Mr Mullan would oversee HR governance and systems as well as the reporting mechanisms through to the PFOD Committee.

Ms Lemon commented that the recruitment process relating to a Senior Workforce manager to oversee employment law and relationships had also recently concluded and she was hopeful of an appointment. She welcomed this progress and said that the HR Directorate was now starting to populate senior posts to provide oversight of specific processes.

Ms Lappin said that, while the Committee was aware that the HR & OD Scorecard and Monitoring Dashboard was work in progress, she welcomed the progress that had been made to date. She

indicated her agreement with Ms Cochrane's suggestion to include cumulative figures in relation to absence and said she would find this helpful given the current focus on this area. Ms Lappin added that having information around the number of Industrial Tribunals would also be helpful.

She said that, working with Mr Dennison as co-Chair of the HR & OD elements of the Committee's work, Committee members could now choose which areas they would like to examine in more detail and she welcomed this opportunity.

Ms Paterson commended all involved in progressing the KPIs to this point. She referred to the fact that there were numerous processes which HR were deemed to own but in reality there were only certain elements for which they were responsible. Ms Paterson queried HR performance in relation to these processes and what elements were owned by other Directorates to ensure a complete overview of performance.

Ms Lappin again welcomed the direction of travel and acknowledged that further work was required. However, she said that, as a Committee member, she believed the Committee was now beginning to receive the detail it required in order to provide assurance to the Trust Board.

Ms Lemon said she wished to take the opportunity to advise members of some Task and Finish work being progressed around the new model of HR and how that would be delivered. She explained that the focus was on the services provided; how they were provided to the Trust; how they were accessed and how good service provision might be evidenced.

Ms Cochrane advised that, in the interim, an integrated set of resources, for example, Frequently Asked Questions, service directory, generic e-mail addresses and e-mail forms, had been developed with the aim of ensuring users were directed to the right resource regardless of which resource they had accessed. Ms Cochrane advised that engagement sessions had been held with staff and within the HR Directorate as well as carrying out user testing sessions with management and TU colleagues to outline the ultimate vision but also the proposed interim solution.

Ms Cochrane said that initial feedback had been very positive in terms of the approach being adopted and the opportunity for signposting within the resources as well as being able to access information quickly. She indicated that it was also intended to implement a customer satisfaction app which would allow individuals to get replies to queries and issues. This would in turn allow reporting on levels of satisfaction to inform KPIs. Ms Cochrane said it was hoped that this would be operational by the end of the calendar year, thus allowing reports on customer satisfaction levels to be available in the New Year.

Ms Lemon stressed that this was the foundation of the business partnering model and would be a more efficient system of being able to access information.

Ms Lemon indicated that the previous model of TU partnership was antiquated and work was ongoing with TU colleagues to develop a new partnership model, setting out clearly what it meant to work in partnership with TUs as well as being clear around the limitations and the governance.

Ms Gardner advised that work would commence in January to scope the understanding of the current working relationships and produce a baseline audit. This, she said, would begin to populate point 12 'Trade Unions' on the HR Scorecard. Ms Gardner said that a key part of this work would be to arrange workshops with staff and managers to explore ways to ensure a shared understanding of what partnership working meant and to identify any concerns there might be around that. She said it was intended to produce a Partnership Framework and added that this would be a live document.

Ms Gardner said there was an acceptance of the value TUs brought in terms of their role within the Trust. She added that this work would then be reported through the JCNC with a view to undertaking further surveys in 6/12 months' time.

She advised that the Trust had been able to secure capacity from the HSC Leadership Centre and Ms Fidelma O'Carolan would commence work in January, following the finalisation of terms of reference for her work.

Ms Lemon acknowledged that there were a number of 'to be confirmed' statuses on the scorecard but assured Committee members that fundamental work was continuing in the background to enable reporting at scorecard level.

Ms Lappin welcomed the work with TUs.

The Committee **NOTED** the update on the HR Scorecard and Monitoring Dashboard.

9 **HR Improvement Plan – progress update October 2022**  
**(PC24/11/22/07)**

Ms Cochrane advised that significant work was being taken forward and said that she anticipated those portfolio areas which had been RAG rated as red would transfer to green in the coming weeks.

She alluded to Job Evaluation and said that there had been a disproportionate number of requests for job evaluation compared to the size of the Trust. She explained that this was reflective of the development of the Trust over the last number of years. Ms Cochrane confirmed that the backlog had been addressed with panels and consistency checking panels meeting on a fortnightly basis. She pointed out that this was due to additional staff being appointed which had resulted in more regional training being available with the Trust taking four more places for Management Side training.

Ms Lemon acknowledged that, whilst the backlog had been addressed, 1-2 legacy cases remained. She alluded to the priorities within the Improvement Plan, particularly around HR governance, and said she would be keen to develop an assurance framework for the Directorate as well as revisiting the HR Risk Register. She undertook to bring the outworkings of this back to a future meeting.

Ms Lemon reminded members that the Trust's Health and Wellbeing Strategy had been approved at the August Trust Board meeting and she was considering the establishment of an in-house group to oversee both the culture work and the Strategy.

Ms Lappin welcomed the updates and said she had been encouraged to hear that those red rated areas would soon transfer to green.

Ms Gardner acknowledged that the organisation was in a period of growth and it would be important to improve employment experience with all processes.

Referring to raising concerns policy, Ms Gardner said it had become clear in September that it would not be feasible to launch the policy in Quarter 4. She added that consideration was now being given to having a public awareness campaign to support the policy as well as having a raising concerns awareness week within respective Trusts.

Ms Lemon referred to the new leadership development programme being offered by the HSC Leadership Centre. She stressed the importance of creating an environment that was conducive in supporting managers to attend the programme.

Ms Lappin welcomed these development and said she would be meeting with Ms Gardner in her role as NED Speaking Out Champion. She said that she would like to be involved in the awareness week to be held in each Trust and undertook to speak to Ms Gardner in relation to this.

The Chair thanked Ms Lemon and colleagues for the update in relation to the HR Improvement Plan and this was NOTED by members.

#### 10 **Maximising Attendance Highlight Report (PC24/11/22/08)**

The Chair welcomed Ms Shirley Young and Ms Pauline Larkin to the meeting and, at his invitation, they updated on the salient points of the Highlight Report.

The Chair welcomed the progress made and noted that this had been an area of particular interest to members for a number of years.

Ms Lemon thanked Ms Young and Ms Larkin for the work which had been done to date and emphasised the importance of the engagement sessions which had been undertaken. She alluded to discussions at the previous meeting where members had been updated on a number of actions already being progressed such as standing down legacy arrangements around pay which may not



have had up-to-date compliance with AfC Terms and Conditions of service. Ms Lemon advised that TU colleagues had been kept updated around the changes being made and formal arrangements for engagement were in progress.

Ms Lemon said that, while it would be easy to produce a spreadsheet giving information on, for example, how many Return To Work interviews had taken place, the key issues were how the interviews were being conducted and how managers were being supported and equipped to carry out these interviews effectively.

Ms Lemon highlighted the linkages of this work to health and wellbeing. She pointed out that, as well as being the system used to pay staff, HRPTS was also used to source data for Trust Board reports and said that the aim was to move to a live dashboard which would allow contemporaneous information on how many staff were absent from work on that day for example.

Ms Lappin acknowledged that further work was required and said that the level of detail available provided a degree of assurance to members.

She suggested that the Committee would like to see how the maximising attendance work impacted on sickness absence levels while having a clear understanding of what steps might be taken should levels not reduce.

Ms Lappin suggested that it might be helpful to have a benchmark in terms of what was achieved elsewhere in similar organisations. She agreed with Ms Lemon's point that the Committee would be more interested in the manner in which Return To Work interviews were being conducted and whether they were effective as opposed to the actual number of interviews.

Ms Lappin referred to the engagement with managers and queried her observation that it had been more positive in some areas than others. She asked that, if this were the case, what approach was being taken to address this to encourage greater engagement.

Ms Young advised that engagement had been positive and both she and Ms Larkin had been welcomed at all sessions. However, she said she would be concerned that, during some engagement sessions, a number of the actions reflected some of the cultural

issues they were trying to address. Ms Young said that she would assure members that she and Ms Larkin would continue to encourage staff to see the benefits of engaging in the manner being promoted by HR compared to a 'command and control' approach.

Ms Lappin said that she was somewhat reassured by Ms Young's response and welcomed that further support and follow-up were provided to those who might initially find the cultural change challenging. She alluded to the fact that the maximising attendance project was at an early stage and, while there had been challenges, these had been managed effectively and the overall feedback had been positive.

Mr Nicholson referred to para 2.3 in the Highlight Report and noted the marked reduction from 155 employees on long term absence in a September 2022 snapshot to 113 employees on 16 November.

Ms Young cautioned that there had been some data cleansing since the last report to the Committee and data was now more reliable. She also stated that, for a complete picture, long term absence should always be seen along with short term. Ms Young also asked Ms Larkin if she could elaborate as to why the figure had decreased. Ms Larkin stated that the HR Advisers had been working on the current case management style and had been categorising and prioritising Level 3 cases which had resulted in some long term absences being brought to a conclusion.

Ms Lappin suggested that, at some point, the Committee may wish to explore long term absences in more detail should a reduction in long term absences not be evident.

Ms Lemon indicated that the current focus of the maximising attendance work was on Level 3, ie relating to the final review of individuals who were returning to work, being redeployed, seeking ill-health retirement or a review of their employment by NIAS.

Ms Young advised that a data cleansing exercise was currently being undertaken in order to have assurance over the figures presented. She explained that this was not unexpected when there was renewed scrutiny of data.

The Chair thanked Ms Young and Ms Larkin for their Highlight Report which was **NOTED** by the Committee. They withdrew from the meeting.

11 **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting of the People Committee will take place on Thursday 2 February 2023 at 9.30am in the Boardroom, NIAS HQ.

12 **Any Other Business**

(i) **Industrial Action**

Members **NOTED** the update from Ms Lemon in relation to the potential for Industrial Action.

**THIS BEING ALL THE BUSINESS, THE CHAIR DECLARED THE MEETING CLOSED AT 11.40AM**

**SIGNED:** \_\_\_\_\_



**DATE:** 20 April 2023