

Attendees

Dame Susan Rice – Chair
Professor Alasdair Smith – Commissioner
Professor Francis Breedon – Commissioner
Professor David Ulph - Commissioner

John Ireland - Chief Executive
Claire Murdoch, Head of Devolved Taxes and Social Security
David Stone, Head of Economy, Income Tax and VAT Forecasting
Susie Warden – Head of Strategy, Governance and Corporate Services
James H White – Governance Manager

1. Welcome and Introduction

Dame Susan Rice welcomed all to the meeting, noting that there were no apologies. There were neither declarations of interest in relation to agenda items nor notification of any other business beyond that already included in the agenda. The minutes of the meeting on 7 November were agreed as an accurate record and the action log was noted.

2. Chair's Update

Dame Susan Rice reported a telephone call with DG Scottish Exchequer had been arranged for the previous week but that had been postponed. On Friday, 6 March she had attended the annual Scottish lunch of the Association of Tax Technicians and Institute of Taxation at which Graeme Roy (Director of the Fraser of Allander Institute) had spoken positively about the work of the Scottish Fiscal Commission.

Cabinet Secretary for Finance had written to confirm that the Medium Term Financial Strategy would be published on 21 May 2020.

3. Chief Executive's Update

John Ireland highlighted that the funding request for refurbishment of Governor's House had not been agreed by Scottish Government. However, recognising the impact of the delayed Scottish budget timetable on the Commission's projected spend, Scottish Government had agreed to make available £75,000 in 2020-21 to upgrade the toilet facilities. Staff had been consulted about the layout, and there was a consensus for provision of three toilet cubicles (which could be allocated female, male, and gender neutral) and a shower.

It was reported that work was being taken forward on obtaining building warrants and listed building consent (which remains valid for five years) for all of the work identified within the overall plan for improving Governor's House. Beyond the toilets, work would be taken forward on the other parts of the plan as and when funding became available.

In relation to staffing the role of C Dunlop had been changed from entirely income tax to 50% income tax and 50% on spending/borrowing.

4. Audit and Risk Committee

David Ulph highlighted that Audit Scotland had increased the level of materiality (indicating increased confidence in the Commission) and affirmed that they would continue to apply the less complicated bodies audit process.

It was also noted that the risk card format was being revised and Susie Warden highlighted the key comments from the risk overview. In relation to Partner Organisations, the departure of a key member of SG was noted, and that would require relationships to be built across a wider range of contacts.

It was also noted that since the Senior Management Team had reviewed the Risk Cards, the risks (and perceived risks) in relation to COVID 19 had changed. Scottish Government was sharing with all public bodies guidance on planning.

5. Finance

Susie Warden highlighted the key points from the paper. It was confirmed that staff were supportive of the plans to refurbish Governor's House, prioritising improvements to the toilets in 2020-21.

When the Commission's funding for 2020-21 was confirmed, Corporate Services team would develop a budget for the year, taking on board lessons learned from this financial year. John Ireland would continue to engage with Scottish Government about multi-year budgeting beyond 2020-21.

Action Point 1 – Corporate Services Team would develop the budget for 2020-21 when the Commission's funding is finalised.

Action Point 2 - John Ireland would continue to engage with Scottish Government about multi-year budget beyond 2020-21.

6. Corporate Policies and Statutory Reporting

Corporate Plan 2020-23 and Business Plan 2020-21

Work was ongoing on drafting the Corporate Plan a draft of which would be circulated to the Commissioners in the near future. The Business Plan would follow on from the Corporate Plan.

Action Point 3 – the draft Corporate Plan 2020-2023 would be shared with Commissioners in the near future.

Records Management Plan

Work was planned to complete this plan for agreement by Commissioners and the Keeper of the Records by May 2020.

Biodiversity Report 2017-20

Subject to minor revision highlighting the broader actions being taken by the Commission on Climate Change, the draft report was approved for publication.

7. Other Issues – Annual Report and Accounts 2019-20

Work is in hand to prepare for the financial year-end and to produce the Annual Report and Accounts and other information Audit Scotland require for their annual audit work. It was noted that the Commission was in a better place than the previous year. It was noted that there had been a change in audit personnel; however, the person taking the lead was involved with last year's audit and the Senior Manager would remain unchanged.

8. Any other business

Staff Survey 2019

It was reported that Progressive (who had done the stakeholder survey) had been appointed to analyse the results of the staff survey and further work had been commissioned to compare this year's survey with the 2018 survey. That analysis should be available by Friday, 13 March. A more informed discussion about the survey results, and development of an action plan would then take place. It was noted that we intended to commission Progressive to manage the whole of the Staff Survey 2020 from data collection to analysis.

Action Point 4 – detailed discussion on the outcome of the staff survey would take place when the final survey analysis was made available.

COVID 19

John Ireland highlighted that although the Business Continuity Plan had been tested a few times, it had not been tested during a forecast period. Training on, and practice of remote working tools was being undertaken. Given the anticipated peak of absences, there may be implications for the production of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and its forecast. A range of potential scenarios were discussed which would inform ongoing planning discussions with Scottish Government officials. Managers were planning what work would be undertaken should the Medium Term Financial Strategy be postponed, for example model development.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, 10 June 2020.

Scottish Fiscal Commission
12 March 2020