

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 Social Security and Public Funding
David Stone - Head of Economy and Tax
James H White - Governance Manager, secretariat

Apologies

Susie Warden - Head of Strategy, Governance and Corporate Services

1. Welcome and Introduction

Dame Susan Rice opened the meeting. There were no declarations of interests or notification of any other business, and apologies were noted as above. The minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2021 were agreed as an accurate record. The action log was noted.

2. Chair's Update

Dame Susan Rice reported that the search for a new Commissioner was progressing, as was the search for a new Chair.

3. Chief Executive's Update

John Ireland highlighted the content of the update paper commenting that there had been an in-depth discussion at the Audit and Risk Committee about hybrid working in Governor's House.

4. Audit and Risk Committee

David Ulph noted that the staffing risk had the most discussion, where there was a concern that the proposed reduction of the score was felt to be too much. Accordingly the Audit and Risk Committee had recognised that there had been a degree of improvement and agreed a slightly reduced score of likelihood 4, and impact 4. The Committee would continue to monitor this risk.

In relation to the Partners score, which reflected changes in SG liaison team and some issues with communications with other SG colleagues during the last forecast, it was confirmed that concerns about SG were not systematic, and a number of process improvements were in the pipeline.

Accommodation was fully discussed and how we move to new ways of working, which may be different to the previous norm. It was recognised that different staff groups could have different priorities about returning to Governor's House. There were concerns about the effectiveness and practicality of hybrid meetings; SGDIAA had offered to share any examples of best practice from other bodies.

It was recognised that how Commissioners and staff interaction would need to be considered, recognising that there were benefits from more regular Commissioner virtual meetings, supplemented by face to face meetings in Governor's House.

5. Finance

John Ireland noted the updated paper which incorporated late information on accruals and spend, resulting in an expected underspend of £56,000. The savings achieved by delays in recruitment was being used to invest in redecoration of the offices in Governor's House (painting and carpeting) and staff training (such as report writing, economics for non-economists, and statistics).

It was confirmed that the Commission's funding request for 2022-23 had been met in full including additional resourcing for the fiscal sustainability work. This, together with indicative funding for 2023-24, and 2024-25, would be confirmed in writing from Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy in due course.

The Governance Board noted the paper.

6. Corporate Policies and Statutory Reporting

Fol/Publications Scheme/Privacy Notice - Governance Board approved the policy, noting that it had been updated last year to reflect changes in the Data Protection legislation.

Standing Orders - Governance Board approved the orders, noting that they had been updated to update the approval of Freedom of Information about operational matters by the Chief Executive rather than the Chair.

Audit and Risk Committee Terms of Reference - Governance Board noted and approved the Terms of Reference.

Code of Conduct - It was explained that the updated Code of Conduct was based on the recently published new Model Code of Conduct. There were two new sections, one relating to election expenses (though as Commissioners are appointed after a fair and open recruitment this does not apply to the Commission), and one relating to close family members who have transactions with the Commission or are likely to have transactions or do business with it. Governance Board confirmed that it was content with the updated Code of Conduct. The Code will need to be approved by the Ethical Standards Commission before an updated Register of Interests can be produced.

Register of Interests November 2021 - This was circulated in correspondence in November 2021, based on the existing Code of Conduct. Governance Board confirmed it was content with the Register.

Meeting our Diversity and Equality Requirements - Governance Board noted that work was still ongoing and that it would be discussed at the meeting to be arranged in May 2022.

7. Staff Survey 2021

John Ireland commented that the results had held up against the Staff Survey 2020 and there were signs of some improvement.

It was noted that although C band staff and above were more confident that was not reflected in the same way for Band B staff; the survey had included all employed by the Commission, including more recently appointed staff.

It was noted that some staff had reported that they were less clear about the overall purpose of the Commission; this may reflect that over time the Commission has taken on a greater range of work, for example the work to be started on long-term fiscal sustainability.

This was similar to a sense of disengagement often reported by junior staff in SG policy areas, but less so with comparable analytical areas of work. Due to the small numbers involved it was not possible to make a comparison of the survey results between teams within the Commission.

SMT is to meet with Progressive, who analysed the survey, to discuss the findings and consider what actions need to be taken.

8. Any other business

Corporate Plan 2022-25 - The Governance Board had agreed that the existing Corporate Plan would be extended to March 2022. A draft of the plan for 2022-25 had been prepared, with the aim of consulting on it in March 2022 and publishing in early April 2022.

Business Plan - a draft business plan was in hand with the aim of publication by the end of March 2022.

Governance Board confirmed that it was content with these timelines, noting the delay in publication of the Corporate Plan 2022-2025 from March to April 2022.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be arranged for a date to be confirmed in May 2022.

Scottish Fiscal Commission
17 February 2022