

MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTIETH MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE OF ARMAGH OBSERVATORY AND PLANETARIUM HELD ON 6 DECEMBER 2021 AT 11.00 AM IN THE PLANETARIUM BOARDROOM

Present: Mr J Briggs (Chair), Rev Canon W M Adair, Mr S Brown, Mr G Cox, Professor M Darnley, Professor L Harra, Professor C Jackman, Mr P Kennedy, Dr K Lemon, Professor M Mathioudakis, Mr P McGurgan, Mr E Rooney and Mr R Wilson

In Attendance: Professor M Burton (Director), Mrs C Corvan (Head of Corporate Services), Mr L Knox (Head of Finance), Dr M Sarzi (Head of Research), Mr J Murray (Boardroom Apprentice), Ms Lizanne Kennedy (Department for Communities), Ms Tara Florence (Hamilton Architects), Professor Alex Wright (MAG) and Mrs L Brown (Corporate Manager)

1. OPENING REMARKS

- 1.1 At the outset the Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. In particular, he welcomed Ms Lizanne Kennedy, DfC; Tara Florence, Hamilton Architects and Professor Alex Wright, MAG and advised that Patrick Gallen and Rachel Weir, Grant Thornton would be joining the meeting following consideration of Agenda Item 1 to observe proceedings.
- 1.2 The Chair congratulated Matt Darnley on becoming a Professor; Professor Mathioudakis on having been awarded the 2021 Institute of Physics Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin Medal and Prize for distinguished contributions to plasma, solar or space physics and Roger Wilson, who would be joining the meeting at 12.00 noon, on having been awarded the Institute of Directors Northern Ireland – Director of the Year Award 2021.

2. APOLOGIES

- 2.1 There were no apologies.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 3.1 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 point during the meeting.

4. CONFIDENTIAL ITEM REMOVED

Having been thanked for their attendance Ms Florence and Professor Wright retired from the meeting at this juncture. Ms Kennedy also retired from the meeting at this point.

Following a short break, the meeting resumed at 12.20 pm at which time Messrs Wilson and Murray joined the meeting and Mr Gallen and Ms Weir as observers.

5. CHAIR'S REMARKS

- 5.1 At the resumption of the meeting the Chair reported that they were now joined by Mr Roger Wilson and he reiterated his opening remarks offering congratulations to Mr Wilson on the Institute of Directors Northern Ireland – Director of the Year Award 2021 (Public Sector).
- 5.2 The Chair also welcomed Mr Jason Murray, Boardroom Apprentice and reminded Members that Patrick Gallen and Rachel Weir, Grant Thornton would be observing proceedings.
- 5.3 The Chair again 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 point during the meeting.

6. MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2021

- 6.1 The minutes of the meeting of 20 September 2021 were reviewed and approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.

7. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- 7.1 There were 10 matters arising from previous meetings. It was proposed to close 6 of these and 4 remained ongoing.
- 7.2 There were no further matters arising.

8. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

- 8.1 The Committee noted:
 - letter dated 22 October 2021 from Deirdre Hargey MLA, Minister for Communities regarding the DfC Climate Change Action Plan;
 - Management Committee Skills and Attributes Audit – Summary Report.
- 8.2 The Chair reported that the Management Committee Review of Effectiveness process had commenced prior to the meeting in progress with an introductory session facilitated by Patrick Gallen and Rachel Weir, Grant Thornton. There would be further meetings in the future and a session with staff was planned for the afternoon.
- 8.3 The Management Committee meeting originally scheduled to take place in September 2022 had been rescheduled for Monday 3 October 2022.
- 8.4 The Chair reported that the Permanent Secretary, Tracey Meharg was due to retire at the end of March. The Committee agreed to forward a letter of good wishes to her. **Action MC 6/12/21-2 Letter to be forwarded to Permanent Secretary.**

9. REPORT FROM DIRECTOR

- 9.1 Professor Burton guided the Committee through his report, elaborating briefly on the matters contained within it which included an update on AOP activities and operations; Head of Research Report and updates on 2021/22 Resource Budget; Governance and Audit.

9.2 In terms of AOP activities and operations, the Committee noted:

- COP26 (“Conference of the Parties” 26) participation;
- highlights relating to Planetarium operations:
 - the Planetarium continued to be fully booked for shows with reduced capacity having risen from 30% to 50% over the period;
 - schools were booking again and Cosmic Classrooms (online) were also being facilitated;
 - for September 2021 there had been a 30% increase in overall visitor numbers from 2019, afternoon visitors had increased as had dwell time;
 - Observatory tours continued;
 - AOP had conducted two events associated with its selection as a regional hub for the James Webb Space Telescope education;
 - Mission Santa had sold out by the end of October;
- updates on a number of Armagh Heritage activities:
 - meeting with the NI National Lottery Heritage Fund office;
 - two applications for heritage funding were being prepared;
 - Oral History programme interviews and work towards acquiring Museum Accreditation continued;
- the biennial Robinson Lecture, delivered by Professor Caitriona Jackman, took place on 24 November;
- 3 AOP students had completed their weather observer training;
- the OPEN Fellowship application to University of Oxford had been successful;
- AOP’s support for ABC Council’s City of Culture bid for Armagh;
- the Strategic Plan had been launched on 6 October;
- arising from the recommendation at the September meeting, the current stock of Gemstones in the Planetarium Shop was being depleted, however a suitable replacement had not yet been identified;
- the update on capital projects.

9.3 The Committee also noted the updates in respect of 2021/22 Resource Budget and Governance and Audit activities.

9.4 Dr Sarzi took Members through his Research Report, which had been embedded within the Director’s Report, and provided updates in respect of research activities including:

- 3 funding bids for PhD funding through the RoI HEA Shared Island Research scheme (2 proposals) and the STFC CDT scheme;
- developing AOP’s plans in terms of Data Visualisation and Visual Analytics;
- appointment of Dr David Eden as Öpik Fellow;
- an update on Early-Career Fellowship applications.

9.5 Further to the report, Dr Sarzi advised that Dr Donna Rodgers-Lee would not be progressing either of the applications outlined.

9.6 The Chair thanked Professor Burton and Dr Sarzi for their updates.

9.7 In response to a query from Mr Rooney regarding the funding applications, Dr Sarzi advised that, in respect of the STFC Doctoral Training Centre application, QUB and AOP would be invited to interviews in February. With regard to the North-South proposals, initially the assessment was to take place at the beginning of December. Whilst the deadline had been extended he expected the outcome to be known by the end of the year. He added that there were other funding opportunities coming on-stream.

9.8 The Committee approved the Director's report.

10. UPDATE FROM THE AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE (ARAC)

10.1 Mr Brown informed the Committee that ARAC had noted the summary of responses to the ARAC Effectiveness Checklist.

10.2 The Committee considered two papers in respect of Internal Audit. The Review of Fixed & Heritage Assets provided Satisfactory Assurance and had made no recommendations and the Status of Outstanding Audit Recommendations, which remained unchanged since the September meeting, determined two of the four remaining outstanding recommendations as ongoing.

10.3 The Risk Register had been presented and the issue that the rating for pre- and post-treated risks hadn't altered in many instances discussed. It had been acknowledged that some of this was as a result of external factors and so a modification to the register had been agreed to clearly identify those that were within AOP's control to change and those that were not. The main issue on which a 'deep dive' approach would be taken was that of cyber security.

10.4 In terms of External Audit, the Chair reported that the proposed date for the September 2022 ARAC meeting was unsuitable for NIAO. This had been rescheduled to Monday 3 October 2022. Mr Brian Clerkin had advised it was his last meeting and the ARAC thanked him for his contribution to AOP.

10.5 ARAC had considered two policies and recommended Management Committee approval:

- Conflict of Interests Policy – amended in light of DAO (DoF) Guidance and to widen its scope to cover Management Committee and Board of Governors;
- Bring Your Own Device Policy – a new policy developed, which ARAC had approved as an 'Interim Policy'.

10.6 Mr Brown reported that ARAC had considered a paper regarding DAO (DoF) 08/21 relating to Departmental delegations and requirements for DoF approvals which proposed the value of gifts received increase from £50 to £250. The guidance also required that Department approval be sought if insurance was purchased which exceeded statutory insurance. ARAC had agreed to increase the maximum limit in relevant AOP policies to £250 and to await further DfC guidance in relation to the insurance matter.

10.7 The Committee had noted that two successful HMRC compliance reviews had taken place in respect of PAYE and Expenses and Tax.

10.8 ARAC had received a presentation from Mr Joe Dolan, Head of NI Cyber Security Centre around the increasing risk of cyber security. Mr Brown explained that there were criminal, national and international actors targeting organisations and AOP was not outside their target. He advised that the main issue was how to make security as tight as necessary based on business needs, the most paramount of which were the integrity of the corporate systems and the ability of research to integrate properly nationally and internationally. A Business Impact Assessment would be carried out and from this a process of work would be taken forward to get to the level of security deemed appropriate for the organisation given the damage it could do and AOP's recoverability.

10.9 The Chair thanked Mr Brown for his report and the Management Committee approved the Risk Register; the revised Conflict of Interest Policy; the new Bring Your Own Device Policy as an Interim Policy and to increase the maximum limit of gifts received to £250.

11. UPDATE FROM THE STAFFING POLICY AND REMUNERATION COMMITTEE (SPRC)

- 11.1 Mr Rooney advised that SPRC had met virtually on 1 December. It was planned to discuss its Effectiveness Review at the March meeting. The Committee received a report from the Head of Corporate Services who provided an update on some of the issues in terms of progress against the skills and resource gaps for the organisation, as having the right skills and level of resources to address and deliver on the strategy and key objectives was a key issue for SPRC. A range of actions were being taken by SMT to address those gaps and of note for the Committee was the possible funding from the Department for a Project Manager to develop the Outline Business Case.
- 11.2 SPRC considered the staff bonus scheme which was directed at grades EO1 and below and had followed the NICS scheme. Mr Rooney explained the NICS scheme had been discontinued as part of the last pay settlement. The Committee had discussed continuation of a bonus scheme for junior staff within AOP. A draft Policy Statement of the scheme had been drawn up and would proceed to consultation with staff and any issues raised would be brought back to the next meeting of SPRC. SPRC was content with continuation of the scheme and to recommend it to the Management Committee as something to be retained.
- 11.3 The Committee had received proposals for 2021 staff bonuses reflecting exceptional work of the staff involved and it endorsed bonus payments for 7 members of the Education Team, 4 of the Corporate Team and 2 individuals working on temporary projects for the organisation. The total value of bonus payments being £2,280, which was within the 0.2% permitted of the total annual non-industrial wage bill for the organisation. SPRC recommended this payment to the Management Committee.
- 11.4 Mr Rooney advised that the Committee had also discussed the proposal to seek accreditation for the Diversity Charter Mark Northern Ireland, a commitment to inclusion and diversity within organisations. The first step was to have a commitment signed. SPRC recommended that this should proceed. The accreditation process involved setting targets, particularly for gender in the first stage and signing up to the standards of diversity and inclusion. There was an independent accreditation process. The Project Juno work that AOP was involved in was thought to be very relevant to this process and similar data should be available and used for both. SPRC recommended to the Management Committee to seek Diversity Mark Northern Ireland accreditation.
- 11.5 SPRC had received a verbal update on the recent Staff Survey,
- 11.6 Pay arrears from the 2020 remit had been approved by the Department and included in November salaries.
- 11.7 The Management Committee approved the bonus scheme payments as outlined by Mr Rooney and to apply for Diversity Charter Mark accreditation which required the Management Committee Chair to formally sign the commitment on its behalf.

12. UPDATE FROM THE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (REAC)

- 12.1 Professor Harra reported that the REAC had held its first meeting on 16 November 2021. They had discussed how to run the meeting and had come to the view that it would be more like an academic meeting of discussion and sharing ideas and strategies.
- 12.2 The Committee had discussed the mock-REF exercise AOP went through in 2020, which had been carried out remotely. AOP had not been involved in the formal Research Excellence Framework that Universities underwent. There had been some discussion on the outcome and the weaknesses and suggestions of ways forward. That Committee had offered to formally meet after the REF 2021

outcome was formally known so that comparisons could be made more directly and to undertake a site visit. It was also hoped that if the Committee carried out a site visit the REAC could meet them at that time.

- 12.3 Professor Harra advised that the Committee had discussed whether AOP should be involved in the REF the next time, which was 2028. Whilst this sounded like a long time away AOP would have to start working on it immediately especially in relation to open access publications and so the decision had been taken to assume AOP was going to go in for the REF and decide at a later time after having met with the Mock-REF Committee.
- 12.4 The Committee had considered funding opportunities which had been an opportunity of sharing knowledge amongst everyone. There was a long list of opportunities they would continue to review and add to.
- 12.5 There hadn't been sufficient time to adequately discuss Education and Outreach, though there had been discussion about undertaking an assessment of this in the future. The next four meeting dates had been set and it was proposed to consider Education and Outreach matters first at the next meeting.
- 12.6 The Chair thanked Professor Harra for agreeing to Chair the Committee.

13. 2021/22 BUSINESS PLAN – PERFORMANCE AGAINSTS BUSINESS PLAN

- 13.1 The Committee approved the performance against the Business Plan as outlined in the following papers, which had previously been circulated:
- Corporate Plan Objectives
 - KPIs Q2 2021-22
 - Finance – Period 7
- 13.2 In response to a query from Mr Cox regarding the transition between the old Corporate Plan and the new Strategic Plan and ensuring that what the Management Committee did aligned with the Strategic Plan using the four themes and headings, Mrs Corvan said that the Business Plan for 2021/22 had been an Interim Plan because the new Strategy hadn't been developed at that time. She confirmed that it was the intention to do as Mr Cox had outlined and added that the Management Team had held an away day recently, looking at the objectives for 2022/23 based on the new Strategy.
- 13.3 Mrs Corvan said that a key piece of work was around the skills gaps and identifying how they could get more resource in order to deliver the Strategy.
- 13.4 In response to a query from Mr Rooney regarding the KPI associated with Urban Night Sky accreditation which had been marked as not achievable, Professor Burton explained that there was a significant amount of workload involved in the process, including external validation. Some aspects of the project were proceeding but much more resource than AOP had available was required. He added that when the KPI had been set they didn't quite appreciate the amount of work involved. Given the resource requirement Mr Rooney queried if it was something that AOP would be able to pursue. The Head of Corporate Services acknowledged that they had been too ambitious and had initially anticipated it was something achievable, however, it became evident that they needed to bring in help through CPD. The project was currently in a queue for Q1A's for expert advice to help AOP move forward.
- 13.5 Mr Cox pointed out that the target was to achieve accreditation by December 2021 and sought clarification that it had been marked red because the date wasn't going to be achievable and not

because it wasn't ever going to happen and that it was about re-basing the time for the 2022/23 KPIs. This was confirmed.

- 13.6 In response to a query from Mr Brown about how AOP's urban dark sky related to a potential Armagh City Dark Sky, Professor Burton explained that it would form an important component of having a little oasis of dark in Armagh. He pointed out that it wasn't about a pristine dark sky place but about education and areas where you could educate about the night sky and ecology etc.
- 13.7 Beyond the perimeter, outside of AOP's land, Mr Brown enquired from Mr Wilson if there was something the City itself could do to help spread the light controlled area. In response, Mr Wilson commented upon the uniqueness of having AOP within the City and advised that whilst there was nothing documented within any of the Council's Strategies or Plans at the present time, through what AOP was trying to do and what the Council wished to do on the adjoining land, there was no reason why it couldn't be an aspiration and should be the direction of travel.
- 13.8 At the request of the Chair, Mr Knox referred the Committee to the comments made within his report and advised that there was nothing concerning he needed to draw attention to. He said there were other bids in the pipeline for the January Monitoring Round and they were reasonably confident about receiving more money before year end. Mrs Corvan explained that she understood there was a lot of money earmarked for other projects that was not being used and that that typically put money back into the system for the January Monitoring Round. Some capital bids had been submitted for telescope projects, however, due to year-to-date performance there wasn't much need for further resource funding.
- 13.9 Professor Burton briefly commented on the observatory projects explaining it was through such projects that AOP intended to develop its standing and establish AOP as an influential place on the world stage. He reported that they had identified three different levels of project associated with participation in international observatories and depending upon money available they could respond accordingly. Whilst the projects submitted were about end of year spend, Mrs Corvan added that AOP had started to think more strategically about what projects were the best to be involved in.
- 13.10 In response to a query from Mr Rooney as to why the Capital Expenditure table did not have 'year budget' figures, Mr Knox advised that there was no annual capital allocation. Mrs Corvan briefly explained how capital budgeting worked for AOP and Mr Knox clarified that £741,000 was the amount of money approved by the Department for capital projects which had been allocated over a number of tranches throughout the year to date. Mrs Corvan pointed out that this had since increased due to further allocation of £15,000 the previous week.
- 13.11 Following a query from Mr Rooney the Committee noted progress on the Data Visualisation Lab and Tree Planting projects. Mrs Corvan reported that AOP had a bi-monthly meeting with the Capital Team in DfC and were constantly forecasting if there was any risk to expenditure. In relation to the large amounts not spent towards year end, she advised that everyone was fully aware of why this was the case and why it was profiled in that way. She explained that there would be risks typically where dealing with contractors and this was where AOP started to negotiate tails. In conclusion she advised that AOP was intensely monitored on Capital Expenditure by DfC.

14. POLICY

- 14.1 The Committee approved the Health and Safety Policy, which had been updated, and the Conservation and Collection Care and Access Policies both of which related to the suite of policies required for the Museum Accreditation.
- 14.2 In response to a query from Mr Brown, the Committee noted there were two defibrillators within AOP.

15. AOB

15.1 The Committee noted the:

- date of 2022 meetings - Monday 28 March; Monday 20 June; Monday 3 October and Monday 19 December;
- availability of training as outlined in the report;
- ARAC and SPRC Minutes for September 2021;
- PR Coverage Report.

The Chair thanked Members for their attendance and participation.

Mrs Corvan briefly explained the arrangements for the Engagement Event following the meeting for those on site.

The meeting concluded at 1.10 pm.

Signed as a true record of the meeting

.....
(Chair)

Dated:

Updated Actions as at 19 November 2021

Reference	Action	Owner	Progress
20 September 2021			
20/09/21-01	Officers to put in place the necessary arrangements for the role of Charity Trustee to be transferred from the Board of Governors to the Management Committee.	HoCS	Ongoing December 2021: being progressed to align with 2022 Board of Governors Annual Visitation.
20/09/21-02	Arrangements to be put in place for annual review of effectiveness of the Management Committee and its Sub-Committee to be undertaken in December.	HoCS	Ongoing 28 October 2021: ARAC Self-Assessment Checklist issued to ARAC Members. 6 December 2021: Summary of ARAC Self-Assessment Checklist considered by ARAC. 6 December 2021: Review of Effectiveness session held with MC Members. SPRC Review of Effectiveness to be undertaken March 2022.
20/09/21-03	Summary of Skill Gap Analysis exercise to be brought to December meeting	HoCS	Propose to Close 6 December 2021: Agenda item for meeting.
20/09/21-04	Boardroom Apprentice MOU to be signed.	Corporate Manager	Propose to Close 20 September 2021: Boardroom Apprentice MOU signed.
20/09/21-05	Source of gemstones to be investigated with suppliers.	HoCS	Propose to Close 6 December 2021: update report included in Director's report.
20/09/21-06	AOP's Solicitor to be instructed to seek payment of AOP's legal fees by the Council.	HoCS	Propose to Close September 2021: Solicitor instructed accordingly.
21 June 2021			
21/06/21-03	Continuing Membership of Management Committee for Professor Mathioudakis' Membership to be progressed	HoCS	Propose to Close 20 September 2021: Professor Mathioudakis' continuing membership confirmed and reported. September 2021: a verbal update will be provided at the meeting. August 2021: correspondence issued to QUB.
21/06/21-04	REF-like Research Excellence Report to be considered by REAC	HoR	Propose to Close 16 November 2021: report discussed at REAC meeting. 2 September 2021: preliminary meeting of REAC. First meeting to take place 16 November 2021.

Sp 5 May 2021			
SpMC5/05/21-01	Records of all meetings and discussions associated with the ALV to be marked as confidential and redacted from publishes minutes	Corporate Manager	Ongoing September 2021: moving forward this matter will be last item on Management Committee meeting Agenda
30 March 2020			
MC30/3/20-02	Explore inclusion of Observatory in Armagh Conservation Area and report back to a future meeting.	SMT	Ongoing September 2021: ongoing but no further update at present June 2021: ongoing but no further update at present 15 March 2021: ongoing but no further update at present June 2020: update included in Director's Report