

MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY SEVENTH MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE OF ARMAGH OBSERVATORY AND PLANETARIUM HELD ON 25 SEPTEMBER 2023 AT 11.06 AM IN THE PLANETARIUM BOARDROOM

Present: Mr J Briggs (Chair), Mr S Brown, Mr G Cox, Professor L Harra*, Mr P Kennedy, Dr K
* via Zoom Lemon, Professor M Mathioudakis* and Mr E Rooney

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 and Income Generation), Mrs S Mackle (Education and Outreach Manager), Dr A Christou (Astronomer), Dr S Dane (Boardroom Apprentice) and Mrs L Brown (Corporate Manager)

Apologies: Professor M Darnley, Revd Canon M Hagan, Professor C Jackman and Mr R Wilson

1. WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

1.1 At the outset, the Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded them that it was a hybrid meeting, to speak clearly and keep mics off when not required. He extended a particular word of welcome to Dr Sarah Dane, AOP's new Boardroom Apprentice advising that she would be invited to future ARAC, SPRC, REAC and Redevelopment Sub-Committee meetings. Each person in attendance introduced themselves to Dr Dane.

2. APOLOGIES

2.1 Apologies were received as outlined above.

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. There were no declarations at this point.

4. MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 22 JUNE 2023 AND THE RECONVENED MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 23 JUNE 2023

4.1 On the proposal of Mr Kennedy, seconded by Mr Brown, the minutes of the meeting of 22 June 2023 and the reconvened meeting of 23 June 2023 were approved as true and accurate records of the meetings and signed by the Chair.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

5.1 The Committee noted the 3 actions arising from previous meetings all of which remained ongoing.

5.2 With regard to Charity Registration, Mr Brown advised that declaration forms and reply slips were available for those who did not wish to provide this information electronically.

5.3 There were no further matters arising.

6. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

6.1 A summary of the Management Committee Effectiveness Review had previously been circulated. The Chair considered the responses to be positive and made the following comments:

- there were difficulties associated with strategy constraints; the time that members could contribute and the practicalities of making the most efficient use of that time;
- finding new funding sources for research was important;
- the suggestion of a mid-term assessment of progress against the Strategic Plan would be actioned;
- relationships with stakeholders were strong;
- it was hoped that over the next year Gateway Reviews in respect of the redevelopment project would take place.

Action MC 25/09/23-01 - Mid-term assessment of progress on Strategic Plan to be undertaken.

6.2 Another matter the Chair suggested required discussion was whether the Management Committee should consider recommending to the Board of Governors that the quorum be lowered to ensure that planned meetings could take place. **Action MC 25/09/23-02 - Discussion required about reducing Management Committee quorum.**

6.3 Mr Cox considered it a good report, with feedback and strong comments and responses.

6.4 The Committee was content that the summary covered the points raised in the Effectiveness Review.

6.5 The Chair advised that the Memorandum of Understanding between Armagh, Birr and Dunsink had been signed on Thursday 21 September in Dunsink. He reported briefly on the very positive meetings, facilitated by Ms C Mullan, at which lots of areas of co-operation had been discussed and advised that Ms Mullan was providing assistance in terms of how they could use the Partnership to explore opportunities for funding.

6.6 With reference to the redevelopment project, the Committee was advised of recent positive discussions with SIB and DfC and the need to establish a Project Board. A paper would be brought to the December meeting. **Action MC 25/09/23-03 - Paper on establishing a Project Board to be brought to December meeting.**

6.7 In the meantime to ensure that all issues relating to the redevelopment project were aligned and addressed, the Chair recommended the establishment of a Liaison Committee between the Management Committee and the key officers in SMT, comprising Mr Brown, himself, Professor Burton and Mrs Corvan. The Committee would meet on a monthly basis, and more frequently if necessary.

6.8 The Management Committee approved the Chair's recommendation. **Action MC 25/09/23-04 - Establishment of Liaison Committee.**

7. REPORT FROM DIRECTOR

7.1 Professor Burton's report, which had previously been circulated, included updates on the Armagh-Birr-Dunsink Partnership and UNESCO Aspirations; AOP Redevelopment Project; Budget Update; Summer Visitors; the AOP Conference Season; the Changing Publication Landscape, Juno Champion Application, Meteorological Record and Research Note. Professor Burton took members through his report elaborating on various matters.

7.2 The Committee noted:

- progress on the UNESCO Rol tentative list application;
- the submission of an application to PEACEPLUS and an Eol to the National Lottery Heritage Fund;
- request to submit 2024/25 resource requirements to DfC;
- visitor statistics for June, July and August against those of 2022;
- the Planetarium recorded it highest ever visitor numbers for the month of August in August 2023;
- events and activities held during the summer months;
- conference activity – both concluded and planned;
- an update on the changing publication landscape for research papers;
- re-award of Juno Practitioner status for a further 3 years;
- extreme weather observations in September;
- a recent Directors' research paper.

7.3 Discussion ensued, in response to queries from Mr Cox and Professor Mathioudakis, regarding publications costs, during which Professor Burton advised that AOP had not signed a read and publish agreement but intended paying per publication for the remainder of the current financial year. Thanks to the Planetarium's income there was provision for publication costs in the current financial year and publication costs for 2024/25 were included in the estimated £450k shortfall. Dr Sarzi reported that in the interim, papers would be published availing of the 20% discount for Fellows of the Royal Astronomical Society. Committee noted that there were also charges for publishing in other journals and these would be explored further if negotiations with the Royal Astronomical Society proved unsuccessful. The Committee noted the low level of Republic of Ireland's publishing costs for the entire country which was associated with its membership of the Astronomical Society of Ireland, of which AOP was a member, but was excluded from this arrangement.

7.4 AOP Researchers wishing to publish a paper were required to advise the Senior Management Team of any cost before submitting. Whilst most did publish in Monthly Notices, there were alternatives.

7.5 A further update would be provided to the December meeting.

7.6 In terms of Research Matters Dr Sarzi reported that AOP had supported an early career research fellowship application for 5 years and he commended Dr Apostolos on applying for grants other than via STFC, having submitted an application to The Leverhulme Trust in relation to the data visualisation facility.

7.7 Professor Burton advised that the last of the four conferences at AOP was the ESOP Conference, with which Dr Christou had been involved. Dr Christou explained that the European Symposium for Occultation Projects (ESOP) related to observing bodies in the solar system hiding other bodies in the solar system eg an eclipse of the sun or moon. There had been 26 onsite participants with a further 55 delegates online.

7.8 With the aid of PowerPoint and screen share, Dr Christou gave a presentation on his field of research relating to the Solar System. At the outset he introduced the other members of the Solar System Group, Alice Humpage and Andrew Marshall-Lee. Beginning with a photograph he had taken from the top of the Hill of Infinity on 5 May 2002 of lights in the sky he explained that they attempted to answer what these lights were. Known to be planets in the Solar System - Saturn, Mars, Venus and Mercury - the question had evolved to a set of questions that were more difficult to answer and which were articulated in a consultation document published by the UK Government every 7 years or so and set the framework for the Research Councils to decide where to award funding for Solar System research. These questions related to the origins of the Solar System, what existed at the very beginning and the process of change.

- 7.9 Dr Christou referred to the tools available to assist in answering the questions explaining that at AOP those primarily used were numerical simulations and observations. Other tools included laboratory experiments and meteorites. He added that meteorites were very important, being samples of the solar system bodies they wanted to study, however they did not know which particular bodies they originated from.
- 7.10 Dr Christou then elaborated on some recent projects including the Mars Trojan project funded by STFC in 2015-2021; the story of asteroids and of meteorites and chaotic diffusion of asteroids in the exterior 1:2 mean motion resonance with Mars. Looking forward, The Vera C Rubin Observatory would involve a 10-year survey of the sky, beginning operations in 2025, and was expected to discover 10 times more asteroids than are already known.
- 7.11 Having been thanked for his presentation Dr Christou then responded to queries from members in relation to the composition and crystal structure of meteorites and experts they might seek advice from and what it was hoped to learn from the Bennu sample. He also advised that AOP belonged to a camera network with the aim of locating and collecting any meteorites that might happen to fall in Ireland. He referred to the meteorite fall in Britain during COVID advising that several departments had been mobilised to collect it and explained that if this were to happen in Ireland there was no formal protocol on who was qualified to lead such an undertaking. He was involved in discussions with Professor Jonathan Mackey, Dunsink Observatory who was leading a similar project for a media camera network and to document what should happen.
- 7.12 Referring to public enquiries to the Geological Survey of NI from members of the public who thought they had found a meteorite, Dr Lemon expressed an interest in discussing further with Dr Christou what the process was. Dr Christou advised that there had been a number of occasions when people had brought in rocks and it was difficult because the only way to be sure was by chemical analysis. There were some tell-tale signs, however, they could use to filter out what he described as 'meteor-wrongs'. The advantage of having cameras was the ability to watch it fall and so facilitate its recovery.

Having been thanked for his presentation, Dr Christou retired from the meeting at 12.03 pm.

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

- 8.1 Mr Brown reported that ARAC had agreed to resume pre-meetings with auditors for members only prior to each meeting.
- 8.2 The Committee had considered the summary of responses to the annual Effectiveness Checklist. Over 80% of the 148 questions were either meeting standards or excellent. There were five essential questions where it was considered there was room for improvement. ARAC had discussed the key emerging issues related to induction, training, length of meetings, deep dive reviews and assurance mapping and was content that the Effectiveness Review had been sufficiently considered.
- 8.3 In terms of Internal Audit, the Committee noted that the Internal Audit in respect of Governance including Whistleblowing and Risk Management was nearing completion and had been assured that it would be completed shortly and that the next Internal Audit in relation to Health and Safety would be completed on time, with both reports coming to the December meeting. CavanaghKelly was also providing feedback on the Business Continuity plan.
- 8.4 With regards to outstanding audit recommendations, of the four carried forward from previous years all but one were deemed to be complete and the remaining one was being progressed following recent engagement with PRONI.

- 8.5 ARAC had noted the ICT Strategy and Action Plan Progress Report. ICT Risks had been removed from the Corporate Risk Register into a separate Register and ARAC recommended Management Committee approval of the ICT Risk Register which identified 17 risks – 2 extreme, 7 high and 8 moderate.
- 8.6 In terms of the Corporate Risk Register, which identified 9 risks across 5 risk categories, of the 9 risks once treated, 2 remained extreme, 3 high and 4 moderate. There had been no change to 7 risks; the current risk for 1 had been increased to high and for another the untreated risk had been increased to extreme. ARAC recommended approval of the Corporate Risk Register.
- 8.7 Mr Brown pointed out that ICT risks were reviewed monthly and considered by ARAC quarterly.
- 8.8 ARAC had considered the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement (April-September 2023) and was content to recommend it to the Management Committee for approval.
- 8.9 Mr Brown reported that ARAC:
- received details of a data security incident, which it had agreed was not a matter that should be reported to the ICO, but the Committee had stressed that it should not happen again;
 - noted the draft RTTCWG 2022-23;
 - recommended approval of the draft Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23;
 - noted the Finance Report – Period 4 (July);
 - recommended approval of the Fraud Prevention and Response Policy and the Conflicts of Interest Policy.
- 8.10 The Management Committee accepted the report from ARAC and approved the ICT Risk Register; Corporate Risk Register as at 11 September; draft Bi-Annual Assurance Statement (April-September); draft Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23; Fraud Prevention and Response Policy and Conflicts of Interest Policy.

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

- 9.1 Mr Rooney reported that SPRC had considered its Annual Effectiveness Review and felt that SPRC was generally effective and doing what was required of it under its Terms of Reference. One issue raised related to having sufficient time and scheduling of meetings. There may be requirements for SPRC to meet on a one or two issue basis.
- 9.2 SPRC had considered the workforce planning report. Mr Rooney said this was a very important paper and he asked Management Committee members to look at it. The paper set out the skills and resources for AOP to be sustained, to grow and to meet the objectives that the Management Committee had set out and approved in the Business Case submitted to the Department and how the objectives of that Business Case could be delivered. In particular, SPRC had focused on the importance of having a Research Strategy that could show the direction the organisation was going in and how the various research teams and ongoing projects sat within an overall context of the research and direction of the organisation for the future. SPRC had considered this was a key element in order to be able to make sense of workforce planning requirements for the future and to capture the skills needed, how the organisation was going to grow and the funding issues. The funding context was very important and having the funds to ensure the corporate, education and research teams could all deliver on the objectives set for AOP within a difficult financial environment.
- 9.3 The Chair added that it was clear there would be a cross-over with REAC in relation to this and stressed that it was absolutely necessary for the redevelopment.

- 9.4 Mr Rooney reported that SPRC had agreed that it should meet on this single agenda item and bring forward for discussion to the Management Committee.
- 9.5 The Committee had noted the retention of the Bronze Diversity Mark for a further year.
- 9.6 As had previously been reported, Mr Rooney referred to the unsuccessful Project Juno Champion application. The Juno Committee would now review the feedback received and take the lessons from this to enhance and continue to improve the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda. Additionally, he reported that Project Juno would be changing its criteria and focus in the future and the feedback would be used to inform next steps. Practitioner status had been retained for a further three years.
- 9.7 SPRC Committee recommended approval of:
- Special Bonus Payments;
 - the Safeguarding Policy, Attendance Management Policy and Procedures; Flexible Working Policy and Performance Appraisal Policy.
- 9.8 The Committee noted the report and approved the recommendations from SPRC.

10. CONFIDENTIAL ITEM REMOVED

11. PERFORMANCE AGAINST BUSINESS PLAN 2023-24

- 11.1 The Corporate Plan Non-KPI Objectives, KPIs for the period April-July and a Finance Report for the four months to July 2023 had previously been circulated.
- 11.2 In terms of the Corporate Plan non-KPI Objectives and KPIs Mrs Corvan pointed out that these were now reported on in three periods to align with Accountability meetings. As it was into September some of the actions for the second period in respect of non-KPI Objectives had also been populated. The information provided demonstrated the volume of work being undertaken to meet the objectives.
- 11.3 Attention was drawn to the two KPIs deemed unachievable. With regards to the KPI associated with Urban Dark Sky Place the Committee was advised about recent correspondence and relaxation of the requirement to be 100% compliant at the time of application, instead it would be necessary to be at least 2/3rds compliant with a demonstrable plan for being fully compliant. The other KPI related to the development of one non-astronomy partnership in the use of DVL facilities and required more resources than currently available. Both matters would be kept under review.
- 11.4 Mrs Corvan referred to the suggestion identified through the Effectiveness Review of having a mid-term review of the Corporate Strategy. She welcomed this as an opportunity to not only review progress but also to review if the strategy objectives were still relevant or if there were things not captured that were now important to the organisation.
- 11.5 The Finance Report to the end of July had previously been circulated. In terms of looking forward, Mr Knox advised that a budget deficit of £30,000 had originally been forecast, however, due to the success of the Planetarium break-even was now projected. He pointed out that this did not include costs necessary in the current financial year associated with bringing the redevelopment project forward, as had previously been mentioned.
- 11.6 The funding applications submitted had included provision to cover these types of development costs however they were unlikely to impact on the current financial year. It was reiterated that the

Department was aware of the situation and the costs would be included in the budget estimates moving forward.

12.0 POLICIES

12.1 A report on policies reviewed had been circulated.

12.2 In response to queries from Dr Lemon regarding the Policy on the Use of Bailey House, Mrs Corvan clarified that conference delegates within the policy related to conferences hosted and held by AOP only. Discussion ensued regarding her second query in relation to free use of the property which was offered at the Head of Research's discretion during which Mrs Corvan explained that accommodation was primarily offered to help achieve objectives. Dr Sarzi briefly explained how the free use of accommodation for conferences derived from a recognition that delegates to AOP-hosted conferences would indeed contribute to AOP research activity, as in the case of seminar speakers or research visitors who can also benefit from such accommodation support. He also added that the specific allocation of the Bailey House accommodation to AOP delegates was a process that occurred at the level of the local organiser committee of the four conferences, which he chaired. In this respect, the opportunity to avail of the guest house accommodation was openly advertised, inviting applications within a set timeline and judged primarily on the financial needs provided by the delegates as is common practice in international conferences. Dr Sarzi also suggested consideration be given to further extending the remit of this policy to students returning for their PhD Viva and that may have already vacated their accommodation in Armagh however Mrs Corvan pointed out that Bailey House was supposed to be self-financing.

12.3 With there being only 4 rooms and rather than first come first served allocation Professor Mathioudakis suggested allocating two rooms for conferences, to be allocated on need, and supporting others in need in other ways such as transport.

12.4 The Committee suggested that the issues raised be further discussed by officers and the Policy be brought back to a future meeting. **Action MC 25/09/23-05 - Officers to discuss further the policy on Use of Bailey House and bring back to a future meeting.**

12.5 The Committee approved the Use of Bailey House Policy as presented, noting that it may be further updated in due course. The Committee also approved the CCTV Policy.

13.0 AOB

13.1 The Committee noted the:

- date of the next meeting – Monday 11 December;
- availability of training as outlined in the report;
- ARAC, SPRC and REAC Minutes for June 2023;
- Redevelopment Sub-Committee Action Points for April and August 2023;
- PR Coverage Reports June-August 2023.

The Chair thanked members for their attendance and participation.

The meeting concluded at 12.39 pm.

Signed as a true record of the meeting

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(Chair)

Dated: