



CROWN OFFICE
& PROCURATOR
FISCAL SERVICE

SCOTLAND'S PROSECUTION SERVICE

Resources committee minutes

27 November 2020 meeting, held via Microsoft Teams

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Present

Members

- John Logue, Deputy Crown Agent (Operational Support) (Chair)
- Ian Walford, Deputy Chief Executive
- Graham Kerr, Head of Business Management (Local Court)
- Bill Comrie, Head of Business Management (Serious Casework)
- Jonathan Shebioba, Director of Support Services
- John Cooper, Non-Executive Director
- Sarah Carter, HR Director
- Doreen Crawford, Head of Workforce Planning and Reward
- Mark Howells, Director of Finance and Procurement
- Marlene Anderson, Head of Finance

In attendance

- Richard Brown, Legal Assistant to DCA, Operational Support
- Kathy Brown, Secretariat
- Carla Meechan, Secretariat

Apologies

- Sharon Davies, Head of Management Accounting and Planning

Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting which, due to the current Coronavirus outbreak, was being conducted via Teams.

Minutes from meeting held on 30 October 2020

The Committee agreed the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.

Action Log

The Committee agreed the following amendments to the Action Log and noted progress with the remaining actions.

Actions 10, 11, 13 and 14 are all closed.

HR Update

Staff Update

Head of Workforce Planning & Reward (HWPR) provided an update on the staffing position as at 31 October 2020. The number of leavers has been increasing over the previous three months, which may have an impact on the previous 12-month figures if the trend continues. Resignations remain the main reason for staff leaving, followed by retirements. We are currently expecting an additional 9 members of staff to join COPFS through a range of recruitment exercises, spread across the business. Most of the positions are PFDs and Band Bs.

September saw a rise in sickness absences; however, figures remain significantly lower than the previous 12 months. The Committee noted that the impact of absence (particularly long-term absences) in some units was more significant due to smaller staff headcount.

The Committee discussed the rise in overtime claimed during the last 4 months particularly the significant increase during October which is more than double the amount claimed in October 2019. HOBM (Serious Casework) was satisfied with the increase advising that the majority was from part-time staff claiming for additional hours as a result of staff vacancies and the backlog in trials which was having an impact on case preparers and VIA. HOBM (Local Court) advised they were taking a slightly different approach looking into how they could refine processes with many staff now working from home. It was clear staff are committed to trying to work at the same level, but it was a challenge to measure productivity and balance staff wellbeing. They will continue to monitor the situation closely.

The Committee congratulated the HR team on the good progress made around recruitment within the tight timescales.

Finance Update

2020/21 Budget

The Director Finance and Procurement (DFP) updated the Committee on the current position highlighting a forecast underspend of £1m. Following the decision at last month's meeting, a Workforce Planning Group (WPG) workshop had been held on 17 November where the on-going staffing needs were analysed in depth.

Local court have indicated there are likely to be further savings in Non-Staff Expenditure as the court recovery programme is progressing less quickly than originally anticipated.

It is expected that further costs may be incurred in litigation and the new major case, although there is uncertainty around these estimates.

Several generic recruitment and internal promotion exercises are underway for posts in Local Court and Serious Casework and the WPG had agreed that we should keep our options open if possible, about how many we take from each board. WPG had also agreed with recruiting a handful of essential new posts in Operational Support.

ISD have indicated they could spend all/some of any remaining underspend to bring forward ISD capital projects currently proposed for 2021-22. A paper will be submitted to the January meeting setting out proposals as to which projects could be brought forward.

2021/22 Budget

The DFP confirmed that the capital budget for 2021-22 and the subsequent 4 years have already been set. The baseline allocation for 2021-22 has seen an increase for the first time in a decade. The allocation has been provisionally split between ISD and Estates.

Confirmation of resourcing funding will be announced on 28 January 2021. COPFS have prepared an ambitious bid based on securing essential and desirable new posts, extra funding for major casework, additional running costs for pathology and toxicology and the baselining of the £3.2m which was provided as a one-off sum in 2020-21.

In addition, COPFS are working with criminal justice partner agencies and SG to scope the resource requirements arising from the extra court capacity that will be required to eliminate the growing trial backlog caused by COVID-19.

COPFS are continuing to press the business case for pay coherence.

The Committee thanked DFP and all those involved across the business for the work involved in getting to this position.

Estates Update

The Director Support Services (DSS) provided a verbal update. He advised staff had now been informed of the Executive Board's (EB) decision to close the Ayr office when the lease ends on 14 May 2021. Refurbishment work for the Kilmarnock office to accommodate the extra staff was underway as were the plans to retain an office in shared estate next to the Ayr Sheriff Court. Both were progressing relatively smoothly.

Work is continuing with the plans and costings for the possibility of locating all Edinburgh staff within the Crown Office through possible refurbishment, re-desking and blended working. A formal paper will be submitted to the Committee on this.

Work is continuing as a result of COVID-19 with meetings rooms currently being reconfigured. He advised expenditure remains as forecasted and that he was not expecting any overspend. He will continue to liaise with ISD with regards to additional projects should any potential Capital underspend be available this FY.

Procurement Update

HOBM (Local Court) provided an update on the contracts that have been put in place within the last 2 months showing the savings against each one.

Although some Contract Management work had been undertaken by the Central Procurement Team (CPT) it was stressed that this area requires partnership working between CPT and the service users. The 20 suppliers with whom we had spent the most money had been identified. These are the suppliers which most urgently need to be reviewed to ensure that proportionate contract management is taking place and is being documented.

The Service User Lead forum has been replaced with three Procurement Delivery Groups (PDGs), one each for IT, Estates and Other expenditure. The first of these groups is to meet on 4 December 2020.

An independent review conducted by the SG Procurement Team in January 2019 identified the need for between 1.8 and 2.0 staff (Band D & E) to embed contract management and minimise off contract expenditure.

The Committee acknowledge procurement had moved up on the government agenda and was currently attracting media attention. Effective procurement and contract management should facilitate savings on non-staff expenditure and will reduce the risk of challenge. They agreed to the extra 1.8 staff for this FY and would monitor savings going forward.

Action: CPT to proceed with recruitment of 1.8 additional staff to end of this FY.

Action: CPT to report on total savings made year to date

Agenda Year Planner

The Committee reviewed the annual planner and agreed to change the frequency of the HR and Estates updates to quarterly. They discussed productivity and the ability of organisations to understand change. It was agreed to match this with the recovery plan and review this in February/March 2021.

Action: Agenda Year Planner to be updated and circulated to the committee for comment.

All other business

The Committee thanked Kathy Brown for undertaking the Secretariat duties over the last year. Trevor Davidson will be taking over this role from January 2021.

Date of the next meeting: 13 January 2021