UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 6 JUNE 2019

Present: Nigel Lindsay (Convenor), Mel Roberts (Vice-Convener), Maggie Chapman (Rector), Eric Crockart, Steve Duggan, Tom Lynch, Duncan Macniven, Euan McKenzie, Jan McRobbie, Lynne Mennie, Alan Milne, Jenny Mordue, Iain Percival, Patricia Pugh, Mary Stephen, Judith Taylor and Brian Wood, with Fiona Urquhart (Lead Alumni Engagement Officer), Nicole Cochrane (Clerk), and Mr Angus Donaldson (Item 3).

Apologies: Victoria Aston, Nuala Booth, Colin Duncan, Caroline Inglis, Willie MacColl, Graeme Nicol, Jennifer Shirreffs and Mark Strange

1. MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting held on 7 March 2019 were approved.

2. MATTERS ARISING

- The Convenor noted the request for future speaker suggestions from the previous meeting. The committee agreed that they would like to hear from Dominic Milne, Deputy Head of International Office and Marion Campbell, Vice-Principal Research. Ms Cochrane will liaise with future speakers

  Action: Ms Cochrane

- The Convenor noted that the committee were in the Video-Conferencing Suite for this meeting, in order to test suitability for future meetings which would allow members to dial in. The committee were asked to provide feedback on the location

3. PRESENTATION: MR ANGUS DONALDSON – ESTATES

The Convenor welcomed Mr Angus Donaldson to the meeting.

Mr Donaldson presented and took questions from the committee. Mr Donaldson's presentation on the King's College Campus Development is attached.

Mr Percival asked about the strategy for ensuring collaboration while planning work. Mr Donaldson confirmed that the University is hiring space management staff members. These roles will assist with issues such as ensuring clear strategy and collaboration across campus as development begins. Karl Leydecker, Senior Vice-Principal, is also involved with the process. He also noted that it was important to facilitate growth without taking space from others unnecessarily.

Ms Pugh asked what the timeframe was for these initial plans. Mr Donaldson confirmed projects would be estimated in five-year windows.

Ms Stephen asked what the plan is for Dunbar Halls. Mr Donaldson confirmed that the halls would be advertised for sale. However, there is a paper going to court which may reverse this. There are reservations about selling land in such close proximity to the University.
Mr Milne asked about Mitchell Hall, particularly the future of the picture gallery. Mr Donaldson confirmed that the University still holds the title to Marischal College, although there is no willingness to go back to using the space. Mr Milne noted the marquee being used for graduations compared to Mitchell Hall. Mr Donaldson explained that Mitchell Hall is simply no longer suitable for this, with no appropriate disabled access and the wiring being unsafe. Mr Donaldson also noted that the University is working with the Council and with the regeneration of Queen Street, however full plans will not be available for some time.

It was noted that the fabric of space where the organ and portrait gallery are housed is fine and the pieces are not at risk.

Ms Roberts asked how bold and imaginative they can be with regards to the King’s regeneration. She said that there are changing attitudes, and, for example, green spaces are likely to be more popular than more car parking. How far is the University willing to go? Mr Donaldson explained that the University needs to grow and be sustainable, with the Campus being an urban realm. The real issue for the Campus is that it is quite disjointed. Connectivity and green spaces are so important. 70% of power used is now created on campus. He hopes that the University follows the strategic plan and embraces these goals.

Ms McRobbie asked if these plans can be linked into wellbeing and breakout spaces for staff and students, referencing the Springbank social space in Glasgow. Mr Donaldson agreed that breakout spaces are lacking, and this is definitely under consideration. He noted that flexibility and adaptability are key to these plans.

Mr Crockart raised the difficulty of keeping large glass structures clean and for keeping them quiet. Mr Donaldson accepted these as valid points and noted this is all being considered.

Ms McRobbie asked if the Debater under Mitchell Hall is usable. Mr Donaldson confirmed that the fabric is no good and they would be very concerned about fire restrictions.

Mr Macniven stated that many projects fail due to unrealistic timeframes. He queried what the timescale is for making decisions on where they intend to start. Mr Donaldson explained that one of the boards overseeing the project has been asked to come back this summer with feedback and the other has had changes in personnel. He noted it is going to be a complex process.

Mr Lindsay queried plans for the King’s Pavilion. Mr Donaldson stated that this is a fascinating and classic building, which is largely intact. He could see it being part of the redevelopment. Ms Taylor suggested it could be an idea to have someone from the Private sector come in and make it a performance space. Mr Donaldson liked the idea, however pointed out that Aberdeen has a number of arts spaces already.

It was noted that there is a shortage of museums considering there is such an impressive collection. Mr Donaldson agreed but noted it's very complicated, as museums lose a lot of money. His preference would be to see a collaborative effort such as City of Aberdeen Museum. Ms Roberts agreed and noted a Culture Village would be a great solution.

The Convener thanked Mr Donaldson for his presentation.

4. REPORT FROM THE CONVENER / SUMMER STATUTORY MEETING

The Convener prepared a written report, which was reviewed by the committee. The committee noted and approved the report.

Mr Lindsay confirmed that Mr Purdon was aware of the concerns over timings of the statutory meetings and given this no date for the 2020 University Meeting had been set. It would be difficult for this to happen in December, as the annual report is not published until January.
The Convenor explained that the committee will need to work with the University to secure a suitable date for the winter Statutory meeting. Mr Macniven asked if attendance had been better at the combined January meeting this year, compared with previous years. Ms Roberts confirmed attendance was higher, suggesting a combined meeting is more appealing.

5. ELECTION OF NEW CONVENOR

Under the terms of Standing Order number twenty-two, the Business Committee was informed that there is to be an election for a new Convenor, to begin in post from October 2019. The committee was provided with nomination forms and were asked to submit nominations to Ms Cochrane by 17 June 2019. If more than one nomination is received there will be a vote to elect a new Convenor. If not, the single nominee will step into the role in October.

6. BUSINESS COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP – CURRENT VACANCIES

There was some confusion around the terms of membership and work needs to be undertaken to clarify individual terms of office. Ms Urquhart explained that previously the 21 elected members were split in to three groups of seven. Each group of seven sat for three terms of three years. This meant that each year, seven members of the committee would be up for re-election.

Ms Pugh noted that her end of final term doesn’t make sense in comparison to those she joined with. It was agreed this should be changed to 2024. It was also noted that Mark Strange needs to be added to the members list on the new webpage.

Action: Ms Cochrane

The committee agreed that there was a requirement to co-opt two new members. There were two candidates proposed and both were accepted by the committee. They are Jennie Gibson and Dan Montgomery.

Ms Taylor mentioned that it would be useful to create induction packs for new committee members. The Convener and Ms Cochrane will take this forward.

7. CONTINUING WORKSTREAMS

Member Engagement

Ms Roberts, Ms Mennie and Ms Cochrane provided a brief demonstration of the new General Council and Business Committee webpages, which now sit under Strategy and Governance within the main University website. The pages were streamlined to look the same as the pages for Court and Senate, in order to ensure succinctness across the committees.

The Convenor thanked the Member Engagement team for their work in completing this.

Ms Roberts noted the importance of the new ‘Get in Touch’ form, which now provides a quick and easy way for General Council members to provide feedback or request assistance in University related matters and concerns. She noted that the hope is to see increased contact made from members, so that the committee can further serve their purpose within the University.

Ms Cochrane informed the committee that new member biographies will be required, in order to create biographies in line with the other committees. She requested that Business Committee members submit a photograph and short biography at their earliest convenience, which she will then collate and upload to the new site.

Action: Ms Cochrane / committee members
Strategic Planning Process

Dr Macniven referenced a positive recent meeting with the new Senior Vice-Principal, Professor Karl Leydecker. Dr Macniven and the Convenor will be attending the next University Strategic Planning Workshop on 3 July 2019. He is looking forward to providing input on behalf of the committee. Mr Macniven noted he is confident that they can continue to make a positive impact.

Student Retention

Mr Wood provided an update on the new Student Retention workstream. Mr Duggan met with Nick Edwards, Acting Head of Student Support. His summary of the meeting is that the committee should be reassured. Ms McRobbie had raised a query on mental health and wellbeing. The Principal has created a video to encourage students with mental health struggles to come forward and seek the assistance they need. With the recent Panorama documentary detailing 12 students at Bristol University dying due to mental health problems, this issue is more important than ever. Mr Edwards informed Mr Duggan that he would be happy to come along and present to the committee on the work being done in this area and offered to give the committee a tour of the facilities. This is an item to consider for future meetings.

Action: Ms Cochrane

With regards to widening access, Head Teachers in schools seem unaware of the significant changes in encouraging widening access pupils. In conversation, it seems that RGU comes up more than University of Aberdeen. There is some discussion over whose responsibility it is to ensure school know. The Convenor noted it would be good to know if the strategy for widening access has moved on at all and suggested they informally make the principal aware of these discussions, taking it from there. The committee agreed.

Action: Mr Wood

8. ALUMNI RELATIONS UPDATE

Ms Urquhart, Lead Alumni Engagement Officer, provided a comprehensive written report to the Committee on alumni relations activity. Due to the Principal’s reception for the committee at Chanonry Lodge immediately following the meeting, there were significant time constraints. Ms Urquhart therefore encouraged the committee to read through the report fully after the meeting. She did, however, mention the following:

- The Alumni team has done a lot of work around volunteers’ week this month and will be officially launching their volunteer programme shortly after this.
- The Poster campaign is launching soon, demonstrating successful alumni across many disciplines. This is aimed at current students to inspire and raise awareness of alumni in general. This campaign has the potential to be used widely, an example being for student recruitment.

Ms Urquhart encouraged committee members to get in touch if they had any suggestions or comments regarding ongoing alumni projects.

9. DRAFT COURT MINUTES FROM 26 MARCH 2019 MEETING (IN STRICTEST CONFIDENCE)

The Committee noted the minutes and were reminded of the strict confidentiality of the document.

10. AOCB

No other items of business were noted.
11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Business Committee will be held on Thursday 05 September 2019 at 4pm in the Court Room, University Office.