

**GENERAL OPTICAL COUNCIL****Minutes of the Public meeting of Council held on  
Wednesday 26 February 2020 at 10:00 at 10 Old Bailey, London, EC4M 7NG**

**Present:** Gareth Hadley (Chair), Sinead Burns, Josie Forte, Mike Galvin, Rosie Glazebrook, Scott Mackie, Clare Minchington, David Parkins, Helen Tilley, Glenn Tomison and Roshni Samra

**GOC attendees:** Lesley Longstone, Dionne Spence, Janet Adeyemi (minute taker), Leonie Milliner, Yeslin Gearty and Erica Wilkinson (by telephone)

**Welcome**

1. The Chair **welcomed** members, employees and those in the public gallery to the public meeting of Council.
2. Council **extended**:
  - **particular welcome** to Leonie Milliner (Senior Education Advisor) who was attending her first Council meeting.

**Apologies**

3. There were **no apologies** for absence.

**Declaration of Members' Interests**

4. The following declarations were **noted**:
  - Item nine (2019/2020 business plan and budget): all members of Council **declared** their interest as a 'user as a trustee' as this paper included recommendations in relation to their own remuneration;
  - Item thirteen (Glasgow Caledonian University) Scott Mackie **declared** an interest in this item as he is a visiting lecturer for Glasgow Caledonian University; and
  - Item fourteen (Council Chair Appointment) Gareth Hadley **noted** that this item concerned appointment of a new Council Chair, the post that he currently occupies.
5. Council **agreed** that none of the interests declared represented a significant conflict and that all members could continue to participate in the discussion and make decisions as required.

**Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2019**

6. Council **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2019 as an accurate record of the meeting.

## Updated Actions – C01(20)

7. Council **noted** the actions.

## Matters Arising

8. There were no matters arising.

## Chief Executive and Registrar's Report – C02(20)

9. Council:
- **congratulated** Alistair Bridge (Director of Strategy) on his appointment as Director of Strategy for ABDO and **noted** that his new role gave rise to a conflict of interest, which the GOC noted and managed effectively during his final weeks;
  - **welcomed** Leonie Milliner, Senior Education Advisor;
  - **noted** the links to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and Public Health England guidance that have been placed on the GOC website in relation to COVID-19;
  - **noted** that the Chief Executive and Registrar has been having weekly telecom meetings with Primary Healthcare Sector partners to discuss the progression of COVID-19;
  - **noted** the organisation has finalised its strategy consultation;
  - **noted** the new guidance for registrants in relation to *disclosing confidential information about patients* that will be published on the GOC website on 24 February 2020;
  - **noted** that registration renewal for fully qualified registrants opened on 20 January 2020; and
  - **welcomed** the reduction of 30% of open cases, compared to this time last year, and **noted** that a number of further changes resulting from the FTP Improvement Programme have been implemented. Council **noted** that a full report on the Improvement Programme will be presented in May 2020.
10. In relation to the University of Portsmouth, Council **noted** that:
- the Chief Executive and Registrar had given notice of Council's intention to withdraw provisional approval for the Masters of Optometry programme, with withdrawal taking effect from Friday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020;
  - the University had accepted Council's decision and would not appeal; and
  - The University had requested a reconsideration of the decision regarding the ability of year 3 students to continue their studies at the University for the remainder of the year to complete assessments in June 2020. A detailed analysis of supporting information had been completed by the Senior Education Advisor and the Education Visitors Panel, which concluded that there was insufficient evidence to justify bringing this decision back to Council for further review. The University had been informed.

### Chair's report – 03(20)

11. Council:

- **noted** that both the Chair and the Chief Executive and Registrar had attended the annual FBDO graduation ceremony at Canterbury Cathedral on 20 November 2019;
- **noted** that Deborah Bowman resigned from her appointment as a lay member of Council from 8 February 2020;
- **noted** that the Privy Council has reappointed David Parkins as a member of Council for a final four-year term; and
- **approved** the proposed amendments to the Senior Council Member role description.

### Strategic Plan (inc-EDI strategy) – C04(20)

12. Council **considered** a paper which sought approval of the 2020-25 Strategic Plan for publication. Council **noted**:

- the responses from stakeholders, employees and advisory committee during the consultation process which were broadly supportive and **extended thanks** to all those who had commented.

13. In relation to the use of the word '*continuously*' in the mission statement. Council:

- **noted** members' view on *minimum standards* verses *continuously raising standards*;
- **expressed** the opinion that *minimum standards* were not particularly aspirational, but *continuous improvement* would give the impression that the Council's published standards would continue to be raised; and
- **requested** the mission statement be re-drafted so that it was concise and not open to different interpretations.

14. In relation to '*patient care*', Council:

- were **informed** that this continued to be a theme in the responses received as in previous consultations and **requested** that the strategic plan must demonstrate how the GOC would address this issue and to directly link the response section on revised business regulation.

15. In relation to *future workforce needs*, Council:

- **expressed concern** that responses related to the need to upskill the existing profession to meet future workforce needs and to relieve pressure on the NHS were not drawn out clearly enough;
- **requested** greater emphasis on the opportunities/challenges section which should clearly express this as an outcome sought from the Continuing Education & Training (CET) Review; and
- **requested** that the HSID and Girth reports should be referenced in challenges/opportunities as these suggested a 30% increase in glaucoma cases in community care going forward.

16. In relation to *conflict of interest* on Council/Committees. Council:
- **requested** clearer messaging on how the organisation currently handles conflicts, explaining that this was applied to all relevant individuals who represent and work for the GOC in various capacities.
17. In relation to *vulnerable patients*, Council:
- **requested** this patient group be highlighted within the strategic plan and relevant work programmes identified in subsequent business planning, including addressing any potential concerns/risks within the business regulation project.
18. In relation to *working within our means*, Council:
- **expressed** a view that the organisation needed to be more explicit in saying that we would continue to work within our means over the course of the strategic plan without tying hands of Council regarding registration fees or the use of reserves; and
  - **noted** that the statement on page 16 under efficiency savings refers to this and **requested** that this needed to be included in the introduction page.
19. In relation to *learning culture* Council:
- **noted** that not much was included on learning with and from other regulators and Professional Standards Authority (PSA); and
  - **questioned** whether this might be drawn out more in the plan and linked work programme.
20. In relation to *agile* Council:
- **expressed** the hope that that the organisation would live up to this;
  - **mentioned** that the organisation needed to review and adapt the strategic plan to external changes as time progresses, as this needed to be a living document;
  - **noted** that the GOC should not be scared to change course as necessary; and
  - **committed** to formally evaluate progress against the strategic plan after three years and consider whether we need to revise our priorities to reflect developments in the interim.
21. In relation to *public awareness raising* Council:
- **noted** that there was potentially an appetite to increase public awareness;
  - **stated** that the organisation needed to think carefully before getting involved with public campaigning; and
  - **stated** that such activity should be about raising awareness of optics as a regulated profession, with registrants adhering to professional standards, and less about raising awareness of the GOC.
22. In further discussing the content of the draft Strategic Plan, Council:

- **welcomed** plans to consider our communications approached recognising that we did not make as much use of social media as we might; and
- **queried** whether the organisation had the resources needed to achieve the outcomes foreseen. The CEO said that the first year of the strategy, set out in the business plan was consistent with the budget presented to Council.

23. Council **approved** the consultation findings for publication, **approved** the Strategic Plan and **delegated authority** to the Chair and Chief Executive and Registrar to approve the final version for publication.

#### **IT Strategy- C05(20)**

24. Council **received** the 2020/25 IT Strategy Plan for noting.

In relation to the Strategy Plan, Council **noted** that the strategy has been developed in consultation with the GOC's staff through the IT Steering Group, SMT through the development of the 5-year plan and input from GOC's key external suppliers.

25. Council:
- **noted** the four primary objectives of the strategy; and
  - **queried** whether the Head of IT had the resources needed to achieve the strategy. The Head of IT **informed** Council that the budget was sufficient but the resources needed also included people and acknowledged that the IT department will be busy over the coming months.

#### **Performance report: quarter three 2019/20- C06(20)**

26. Council **received** the quarter three 2019/20 performance report and:
- **noted** achievement in FTP Decision Audit report;
  - **noted** the publication of 2016-18 CET Evaluation Report;
  - **noted** the challenges with the services bundles not materialising therefore impacting on the ability to schedule hearings;
  - **noted** the progress, notwithstanding challenges with funding and availability of placements for ESR reforms; and
  - **noted** that the organisation was making good progress against last year's business plan that was brought to Council.
27. Council **requested**:
- that financial figures be linked to strategic projects; and
  - that the interim Director of Resources to considers a new registration performance measure.

## **Financial Performance Report: nine months to 31 December 2019- C07(20)**

28. Council **considered** the financial performance for the nine months up to 31 December 2019 and the forecast for the year to 31 March 2020. Council **noted** that the Audit, Finance and Risk (ARC) committee held on 10 February 2020 had previously considered both reports.

Council **noted**:

- the deficit of £394K for the nine months ended 31 December 2019, a positive variance of £480K against the budgeted deficit of £874K and positive variance of £11K against the quarter two forecast deficit of £505K;
- two contextual graphs illustrating the overall impact on the GOC's reserves;
- the overall reserves position had improved from the initial projections made in November 2018;
- the organisation continued to perform ahead of its financial targets and, whilst recognising the financial challenges ahead, was on course to achieve a breakeven position by 2021/22;
- the quarter three forecast before unrealised gains for the financial year to 31 March 2020 had improved from a deficit of £129K to a deficit of £723K- a £57K improvement; and
- the last projection for year three has a surplus of £608K, creating scope for new projects in years four and five.

## **2020/21 Budget and Business Plan - C08(20)**

29. Council **received** the 2020/21 business plan and budget for approval.

In relation to the Business Plan, Council **noted** and were **supportive** of the planned key strategic project work and the programme of work to deliver the regulatory, support functions and organisational transformation activities.

30. In relation to the budget for 2020/21, Council **noted**:
- that the budget had been set to be consistent with previous Council decisions on registrant fees, controlled utilisation of reserves and annual average expected return of circa 5.5 per cent on investments; and
  - the financial analysis supporting the budget, including the projected long-term financial planning, impact on reserves and budget assumptions.
31. Following discussion, Council:
- **approved** the 2020/21 business plan and budget and **delegated authority** to the Chief Executive and Registrar to produce a summary of the plan for publication.

### **Whistleblowing Policy Update- C09(20)**

32. Council **noted** the update on the progress with drafting and review of the policy.

### **FTP Audit of Decision- C10(20)**

33. Council **received** the FTP Audit of Decisions and **noted**:
- that the report gave assurance that decisions made regarding Fitness to Practise (FtP) cases are compliant with legislation, rules and decision-making guidance, and that they meet the overarching GOC objective of protecting the public;
  - that the findings cover FTP decisions made in the year 2018-19;
  - that the findings go towards PSA Standard 8- *all FTP decision... are well reasoned, consistent, protect the public and maintain public confidence*;
  - that the full report was seen by the Audit, Risk and Finance Committee on 10 February 2020;
  - that the report covered decisions made by:
    - the Registrar;
    - Case examiners;
    - the Investigation Committee; and
    - Fitness to Practise Committee;
  - the audit samples decisions in all categories, with more emphasis on higher-risk decisions (e.g. Registrar not opening an investigation, CEs closing a case on the papers, FTPC not imposing an IO or a sanction);
  - overall, the findings provided a very good level of assurance with a lot of positive comments throughout the report, particularly in respect of CE decision-making;
  - that the auditor considered one FTPC decision to be inadequately reasoned;
  - there were 22 Learning Points set out in the Management Response; and
  - the key themes of the learning points and that these had been actioned expeditiously.

### **Approval and quality assurance – C11(20)**

34. • Council **considered** the information presented and **approved** the BSC Ophthalmic Dispensing Management at Glasgow Caledonian University.

### **Council Chair Appointment – C12(20)**

35. Council **agreed** the recommendation from the Nomination Committee (NomCo) in relation to the Chair appointment campaign as set out within the paper, including:
- the Council Chair role profile;
  - the Council Chair competence;
  - the section panel membership; and

- the timetable for the campaign.

**Fees paid to Hearings Panel members for cancelled hearings – C13(20)**

36. Council **agreed** the recommendation from the Nomination Committee (NomCo) in relation to the amendment to member fees policy.

**Council forward plan- C14(20)**

37. Council **noted** the forward plan for 2020/21

**Any other business**

38. There was no other business for discussion.

The meeting closed at **15:42**.

**Date and time of next meeting**

The next public meeting of Council would be held on **Wednesday 13 May 2020** via videoconference (time to be confirmed).