

## **Minutes of the Business Committee Meeting held on Thursday 2 May 2024 at 5.15pm, in the Raeburn Room, Old College**

### **Present**

Sir Philip Mawer, Convener of the Business Committee  
Mr Gordon Cairns, Vice-Convener of the Business Committee  
Dr William Duncan, Secretary of the General Council  
Ms Alison MacLeary, Assistant Secretary of the General Council  
The Rt. Hon. Douglas Alexander      Professor Stephen Hillier  
Mr Arron Ashton                              Ms Kirsty MacGregor (online)  
Professor Alice Brown                      Mr Jock Millican (online)  
Ms Manya Buchan                              Dr Bruce Nelson  
Lady Joyce Caplan                              Professor Graeme Reid  
Mr John Clifford                              Mr Devin Scobie  
Ms Ann Cormack (online)                      The Rt. Rev. Brian Smith  
Mrs Almira Delibegovic-Broome              Ms Krystyna Szumelukowa  
Ms Candice Donnelly                              The Rt.Hon. Sarah Wolffe KC  
Dr Frances Dow  
Dr Mary Gunn (online)

**In attendance**                      Councillor Cammy Day, Leader of the City of Edinburgh Council

### **1. Welcome and Apologies**

The Convener welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Alistair Dunlop and Francis McManus.

It was possible to invite Councillor Day to give a presentation to the Committee on the City of Edinburgh Council and its relationship with the University because Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member of Court, was no longer able to attend the meeting due to other commitments.

### **2. Minutes of the Meeting of 29 February 2024**

The minutes were approved.

### **3. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Meeting of 29 February 2024**

- There were no matters arising;
- The Convener reported that further consideration had been given to an earlier query from Brian Smith about having an Effectiveness Review of the General Council. He advised that, due to the current heavy workload in the General Council office and impending changes of Business and Standing Committee Conveners, this was not an appropriate time to have such a Review. The suggestion could be returned to later should that be felt desirable.

### **4. Convener Election 2024**

The committee warmly congratulated Gordon Cairns, who has been Vice-Convener of the Business Committee since 2016, on the outcome of the election process. He will begin his new role as Convener on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024.

## 5. Presentation from Councillor Cammy Day, Leader of Edinburgh City Council.

- Cllr Day warmly welcomed the opportunity to address the Committee, in his capacity as Leader of the City Council.
- He began by giving an overview presentation (circulated with this minute) about the opportunities and challenges facing the City Council, and the present state of the relationship with the University. This was followed by a discussion based on questions from members of the Committee that were provided to Cllr Day in advance.
- The main points noted from the presentation were:
- Edinburgh is a city of contradictions; it is a growing, diverse and affluent city with the largest growing economy outside London and there many positives, but there are challenges, including:
  - Inequalities and poverty: there are marked inequalities in health and persistent areas of poverty; although child poverty is less than the Scottish average, it has remained at 20% over the past decade; middle-income households are now being adversely affected by inflation and other factors;
  - Housing: A housing emergency was declared in Edinburgh in 2023. This is due to high house prices continuing to rise; a lack of affordable social housing; private rents being the highest in Scotland - all resulting in homelessness being a serious problem with almost 5000 households in temporary accommodation;
  - Climate: although rated as 4<sup>th</sup> best in the UK at addressing climate change and City emissions have fallen by 44% over the last 20 years, and there are plans to encourage more walking and cycling within the city centre, much more remains to be done to address the risks of flooding and overheating, which impact disproportionately on vulnerable groups:
  - Financial: due to sustained reductions in central Government funding, the Council will need to reduce its running costs by £160m over the next four years, while demand for its services increases (because of a growing population and new legislative responsibilities) and the cost of providing these services increases due inflation and high interest rates.
- The Council Business Plan 2023-27 has three strategic priorities; ending poverty in Edinburgh, becoming a net zero city by 2030, and creating good places to live and work.
- 'Town to Gown;' many of the challenges and opportunities concern aspects where there is considerable academic expertise at Edinburgh University and sharing this knowledge could bring the skills and innovative ideas to support key projects;  
The City Council is very keen to work more closely with the University for the benefit of all; specific aspects where this could be mutually beneficial include:
  - Delivering on Climate targets so that the City is net zero by 2030 and the University is zero carbon by 2040.
  - Transport, including working on active travel and green transport initiatives.
  - Maximising job creation from the transition to net zero
  - Addressing the regional skills gap, e.g. through alternative degree qualification routes
  - Developing AI and technological solutions
  - Marking Edinburgh's 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary and legacy initiatives arising from the celebrations

### Discussion

**Student housing** is a contentious issue and attempts to create new student only accommodation developments often result in an adverse local reaction which in turn impacts on the planning approval process; Cllr Day suggested new housing developments should involve building a diverse community, with a mix of social housing, student development and private accommodation available to rent or sell; he also acknowledged that students contribute to the local economy and should be viewed as an asset to the community;

Cllr Day expressed gratitude to the University for hosting the recent housing summit at the Edinburgh Futures Institute, following which a letter was sent to the First Minister asking for action on housing;

In response to a question about whether there is enough land available in the city for new housing developments, Cllr Day said there is, but a joint City/University approach to Government to create a Land Commission that could lead to the release of unutilized or vacant land could be more effective.

- **City Region Deal**

It was evident that the City Region Deal had brought considerable benefits to the University but Cllr Day felt that the wider benefits it was expected to bring to the City were not so obvious; the City Council was looking ahead to a City Region Deal 2, where housing would be the biggest priority, including enabling more social housing to be built.

- **Climate Change**

Cllr Day suggested more could be done in collaboration with the City, for example through the Net Zero Leadership Board (which he chairs), to help achieve its climate targets. The City Council is working with partners across the City, and with investors to borrow the money needed to deliver this. Cllr Day also emphasised the importance of the civic and academic parts of the City coming together to help with the planning and development of transport and mobility schemes, especially those that would improve access to university campuses such as Bio quarter.

### **Town and Gown relationship**

- Asked how Cllr Day would characterise the Town and Gown relationship - what it means in 2024, what is working well and if there are areas where more could be done by both parties, he responded by commenting:

- as outlined in his presentation and discussion, there are many ways that co-operation between Edinburgh University and the City Council could be of mutual benefit to both and to those who work and live in the city and neighbouring regions.
  - he is keen to encourage that collaboration and build on the positive relationship he has at a personal level with the Principal and other members of the Senior Leadership Team.
  - yet to many in the city, the University can seem rather 'detached, resulting in negativity around student accommodation developments, despite the significant amount of community engagement work done by the University.
  - the University might wish to take the opportunity afforded by the celebrations to mark the Edinburgh's 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary, to counter the general lack of awareness of its many current successes, e.g. winning the competition to house Exascale super computer.
- In response to a question about whether a more structured relationship with the University would be helpful, Cllr Day thought it would be.

In thanking the Committee for the opportunity to meet, Cllr Day said that although the discussion had, inevitably, dwelt more on the challenges, he would wish to emphasize the many positives that Edinburgh has to offer and the contribution that having many truly outstanding institutions based in the City, including Edinburgh University, can bring through effective synergistic relationships to the common good of its citizens.

The Convener thanked Councillor Day for a fascinating and positive exchange and he left the meeting.

**Action: Slides used during the presentation will be circulated to the committee.  
: Note of this part of the meeting to be shared with senior University staff.**

### **5. Observations by General Council Assessors**

- Douglas Alexander gave a report from the Court meeting on 22 April, which had been held in the Institute for Regeneration and Repair in the Edinburgh Bio quarter. An agenda for the meeting had been circulated to the Business Committee (Paper 2);

- This was the new Rector's first Court meeting and in his introductory remarks, Simon Fanshawe had expressed his intention to foster constructive debate in Court and beyond;
- Principal's Report
  - Noted success in attracting research funding and a 16.6% increase, relative to the three-year average, in the first 5 months of the current academic year;
  - Discussed recent protests and occupations that had taken place in other university campuses concerning events in the Middle East. Regarding challenges to the University's investment policy, it was made clear to the student representatives on Court that the University operates a clear and transparent approach to its investment practice. A wholly independent investment committee makes commercial decisions in terms of investments but within carefully defined boundaries set by the University, who use external fund managers working within the University's social, environmental, governance and other policies;
- Committee Business –
  - There had been no Senate meeting since the last Court meeting;
  - Brief update on Senate elections and the early work of the group implementing recommendations for Senate effectiveness;
- Student Experience
  - Continues to be a challenging area;
  - Positive work being done on a new model for student support and particular roles for Student Advisers;
  - A mechanism is in place to track data across Schools and Colleges relating to the three-week turnaround goal for providing assessment and feedback and this data is expected to be available at the next Court meeting in June;
- Students' Association and Sports Union Reports
  - EUSA's budget for the next academic session has been approved by the Policy and Resources sub-committee of Court;
  - The Student and Teaching Awards have received a very high volume of nominations;
  - Welcomed newly-elected EUSA representatives on Court. Reported continuing challenges with engaging students in existing structures that allow them to be represented in the University's affairs;
- Finance
  - A brief update within the context of an ongoing planning and budget setting process. Discussion centred on both short and long-term cost controls to meet the thresholds that had been set by previous frameworks;
- People and Money Systems and Roadmap Update
  - A general update was given on the improvement plan (the 'roadmap') which was agreed by Court as a consequence of the published consultant's report. The University Executive is now moving to different governance arrangements for People and Money and taking advice from a new body, The University Initiatives Portfolio Board.
  - Court approved its part of the responses provided to the letter sent from the General Council Business Committee. There was recognition that it was an exceptional letter reflecting exceptional circumstances and the weight of concern that had been expressed regarding the implementation of the People and Money changes;
- Annual People Report
  - Discussion of the paper by James Saville, Director of HR, would be deferred to the next meeting of Court so that there would be time to consider appropriately serious concerns regarding staff morale and the student experience;
- Donations and Legacies

- Chris Cox, Vice-Principal Philanthropy, gave a broad overview of current activity and acknowledged that the Principal had been travelling internationally, in consequence of which progress had been made in terms of attracting additional philanthropy.

## **6. Response from Court to submission by General Council on People and Money**

- The Committee considered the response (Paper 3 previously circulated) from Court and the senior executive staff.
- Although it would be possible to ask various questions or seek clarification of some aspects of the response, the Business Committee agreed not to do so both to avoid diverting staff from implementation of the work programme and to avoid creating the impression with Court that we wished to engage in ‘ping pong’. The Committee would continue to monitor progress in delivering the improvements through its normal channels of feedback;
- It was noted that Court will exercise scrutiny and oversight of the recommended programme of work to address the issues raised by PA Consulting by receiving reports from the new Finance and HR Process and System Implementation Board, via the University Initiatives Portfolio Board and Senior Leadership Team.
- The committee agreed to proceed with putting the correspondence from the University Court on the General Council website, for the benefit of members who had previously expressed concern about issues relating to People and Money. This would be done on the basis that the University will be notified in advance of doing so and that all the material being made available is suitable to be on the public record.

### **Action: -**

***A reply will be sent from the Business Committee by the Convener and Secretary to the Court’s response on People and Money. [This is shown in Appendix 1]***

## **7. Draft Resolutions of the University Court**

Professor Steve Hillier, Convener of the Academic Standing Committee (ASC), reported that ASC was content to recommend the following Resolutions:

- No. 4/2024: Undergraduate Degree Programme Regulations
- No. 5/2025: Postgraduate Degree Programme Regulations
- No. 6/2024: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Engineering Biology
- No. 7/2024: Foundation of a Personal Chair of Medieval History

The Resolutions were approved by the Business Committee and a letter will be sent to Court Services to that effect.

## **8. Note of meetings with Chris Cox and James Smith on alumni engagement**

- The main purpose of the meeting on 21 March was to discuss synchronizing connections with alumni hubs and to create opportunities for a collaborative and supportive approach in reaching out to key partnerships;
- The discussion had emphasised the importance of respecting boundaries i.e. the governance role of the General Council as distinct from the executive remits of Development and Alumni and Edinburgh Global;
- Paper 5 is intended as a useful reference document containing action points which will be taken forward;
- Noted that the current Director of Alumni Relations, Rebecca Jones, will be leaving the University in June to become Keeper of Scottish History and Archaeology at the National Museums Scotland; a replacement is expected to be recruited;

- Professor James Smith, VP International, will give an update on progress with the University's Global Engagement Plan at the next meeting of ISC on 7 May.

#### **9. Reports from the Standing Committees**

- The Committee referred to the minutes from the Finance and Standing Committee meeting of 11 April (Paper 6);
- Almira Delibegovic-Broome, Convener of FSSC, highlighted the following:
  - Court Assessors will be able to provide reports on progress with recommendations arising from the Court Review of People and Money;
  - WD is pursuing the issue of access to reports showing the current financial status of the General Council Prince Philip Fund, so that a decision can be made by the Business Committee about the appointment for further General Council scholars in the autumn.

#### **10. Report from the Secretary of the General Council**

- Paper 7 had been previously circulated for information;
- BC members had received paper copies of Summer 2024 Billet and were pleased with the design;
- The following action points were noted:

#### **Action:**

- ***The Secretary will write shortly to those eligible to stand in the forthcoming election for Vice-Convener of the Business Committee;***
- ***The Secretary will invite committee members to give their indicative preferences for Standing Committee membership;***
- ***The General Council website will be updated in due course with detailed information about the AI sessions arranged for the June 2024 HYM;***
- ***Business Committee members who have not already responded should do as soon as possible to the invitation to the Reception at St Cecilia's Hall on 27 June.***

#### **11. Any other competent business**

None.

#### **12. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting would take place at 5.15pm on Thursday, 27 June 2024 in the Conference Room, Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation, Infirmity Street. The newly-elected members of the Business Committee have been invited to attend as observers.

A reception in St. Cecilia's Hall will follow the meeting, to give thanks to the Convener, Vice-Convener and other Business Committee members demitting role, and to welcome new Business Committee Office Bearers and members.

**Reply from Business Committee to the response from Court and the Senior Leadership Team to the letter from General Council on lessons learned from People and Money**

**Sent to Janet Legrand (Senior Lay Member of Court) and Sir Peter Mathieson (Principal and Vice Chancellor)**

On behalf of the Business Committee of the General Council, we should like to express our gratitude to Court and the University Executive for the full and informative joint response we received via Dan Wedgewood (Head of Court Services) to our letter and submission dated 2 February 2024 about learning the lessons from People and Money.

The Business Committee carefully considered your composite response when it met on 2 May and we also had the benefit an oral report from General Council Assessor, Douglas Alexander, on the Court meeting held on 22 April. Members were pleased to hear of your recognition that the Committee's intention in writing to you, in an exceptional set of circumstances, was intended to be constructive. We were seeking to look forward to and encourage solutions, rather than a provide a retrospective analysis of the issues set out in the PA Consulting report. We are encouraged that your response clearly reflects a similar approach to dealing with this complex issue.

Members of the Committee appreciated knowing more about the extensive programme of work now underway to implement the recommendations of the PA Consulting report. We have no wish to impede the further progress of that essential work by raising fresh questions at this point.

We look forward to learning more in due course as this work progresses from the reports we receive from the General Council Assessors. We will also hear, where appropriate, of the progress from our normal programme of meetings in the coming academic year with a wide range of senior executive staff.

You will recall that we drew attention in our letter to the impact of the adverse publicity surrounding People and Money on the University's standing among its external as well as internal stakeholders, including its alumni. With that point in mind, and as there seems to us to be nothing in our various exchanges of a commercially sensitive nature, the Business Committee would like to make them available on the General Council website. Doing so will give re-assurance to those members concerned about this matter by demonstrating the serious way it is being dealt with. You will recall that in our original letter we mentioned the possibility of making the correspondence more widely available after the exchanges had reached a conclusion.

Also, as People and Money issues were covered extensively in Peter's report to the February Half Yearly Meeting, we need to be prepared for this topic to be raised at the next meeting of the General Council on 15 June. It will simplify dealing with this then to be able to refer to the information available on our website and, of course, we shall be happy to coordinate the timing of this with Leigh Chalmers and are sending her a copy of this letter.

Finally, we should like to thank you both for your personal contributions to the preparation of this joint response by Court and the Senior Leadership Team to our representations to Court and for the constructive way in which this exceptional matter has been handled in line with our complementary responsibilities for the prosperity and well-being of the University.

Yours sincerely

Sir Philp Mawer  
Convener Business Committee

Dr William Duncan  
Secretary to General Council

Copies to - Leigh Chalmers, Vice Principal and University Secretary  
General Council Business Committee, including General Council Assessors