



**AGREED MINUTES OF THE SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF STFC COUNCIL  
HELD BY VIDEOCONFERENCE  
28<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

<b>Attendees</b>	
<b>Council Members:</b>	Mark Thomson (chair) (MAT) Richard Kenway (Co-chair) (RK) Isabelle Baraffe (IB) Dick Elsy (DE) Ben Olivier (BO) Hiranya Peiris (HP) Sheila Rowan (SR) David Rugg (DR) Tony Ryan (TR) Frances Saunders (FS) Mike Dunne (MD) – afternoon only Anupam Ojha (AO)  Maya Riddle (MR), Private Secretary Janice Masone (JM), Minutes Secretary
<b>Apologies:</b>	Maggie Aderin-Pocock (MAP)
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Ruth Elliot (RE), UKRI Finance Director & observer Tara Shears (TS), Chair of Science Board Fiona Driscoll (FD) Chair of UKRI Audit Committee (afternoon only)
<b>Invited Guests:</b>	Liz Fellman (LF) – Director of Strategy, Planning & Comms – Items 3 & 4 Grahame Blair (GB)- Director of Programmes- Item 3 Alan Partridge (AP) – Director of National Labs – Item 4 Neil Geddes (NG) – Director of National Labs – Item 4 & 5 Liz Kitchener (LK) - Head of Estates – Item 5 Mark Affonso (MA) – STFC Finance Director – Item 7

<b>Chair, Mark Thomson</b>		
<b>1. Welcome and opening comments</b>		
1.1	Mark Thomson (MAT) welcomed everyone to the seventeenth meeting of STFC Council, which was held by videoconference in order to comply with government guidance regarding travel and social contact during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic.	
1.2	Apologies and other information regarding attendance were noted as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Apologies were received from Maggie Adarin- Pocock for this meeting</li> <li>ii. Mike Dunne (MD) gave his apologies for the morning sessions of Council.</li> <li>iii. Fiona Driscoll (FD) attended for the afternoon session.</li> </ul>	
1.3	MAT reminded Council members that they are required to keep the Secretary informed of any changes to their personal register of interests as they arise. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. No conflicts were declared for this meeting</li> </ul>	
<b>2. Minutes, Matters Arising and Actions from 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020</b>		
2.1	Council approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting held on 26 <sup>th</sup> November 2020	
2.2	The actions from previous meetings were reviewed and were either complete or in progress	
<b>3. Science Board update including discussion of FEC</b>		
3.1	Mark Thomson (MAT) invited Tara Shears (TS) to give the Science Board Update and lead the discussion about Full Economic Costing (FEC). Liz Fellman (LF) was present for the whole discussion. Grahame Blaire (GB) joined for the FEC item.	
3.2	<u>Science Board Update</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Science Board wished to highlight concerns raised by the Astronomy Advisory Panel (AAP) regarding the impact of Covid-19 on academic staff, researchers, and PhD students. UKRI's guidance has given rise to unease from post-graduates who are recruited because of a specific skill set which is not easily transferrable to other areas.</li> <li>ii. The AAP suggested a study should be carried out into the impacts of Covid-19 on STFC's communities, including on issues relating to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. Science Board concurred with this view and felt this was important and potentially impactful enough that UKRI should consider exploring this issue across the organization</li> <li>iii. Council members fully supported this suggestion and thanked Science Board and the AAP for raising this issue. Council members expressed the view that particularly in the current climate advisory panels continued to have a vital role in communicating the concerns of the community to STFC and UKRI</li> </ul>	
3.3	<u>Full Economic Costing (FEC)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. The Science Board statement on the impact of Full Economic Costing (FEC) on STFC funding was submitted to Executive Board and discussed with Council at their November 2020 meeting. The statement has now been included as input into a UKRI research sustainability study being led by Dr</li> </ul>	

		<p>Bryony Butland.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ii. Flat cash funding combined with above inflationary rises for university estates has led to extreme pressure on exploitation and the erosion of support for science areas as identified in Balance of Programmes 2020. This is borne out in consolidated grant panel reports which highlight a worrying emerging trend regarding grant funded time to academics. Science Board feel the situation has passed the point of sustainability and presents a serious threat to the UK's scientific exploitation and capability.</li> <li>iii. Council members shared the concerns of Science Board and its Advisory Panels. Those from universities had direct experience of this situation. Universities were already taking measures to control and reduce costs, any further reduction to FEC would have a devastating impact, particularly on the provision of funding for post-doctoral students. Given this situation, Council asked whether this risk is captured on the STFC and/or UKRI corporate risk register.</li> <li>iv. Council members explored options for further action that universities might take to ease the pressure and suggested engaging with Vice Chancellors and University Councils to ensure costs were understood and audited at senior levels within universities.</li> <li>v. Council members sought to understand whether STFC was disproportionately affected by this issue in comparison to other UKRI Councils. It was explained that although FEC was an issue across all research sectors, it had more impact on the consolidated grant model used by STFC. Council was informed that a review of the STFC grant portfolio including the consolidated grant scheme had taken place and that the office was currently considering the proposed changes/restructuring. These changes would be brought to Council to discuss at a future meeting.</li> <li>vi. Council also questioned what action STFC might be able to take to support its own community at least in the short term. Council learned that although STFC can act on guidance and advice from its advisory bodies in terms of priorities for available funding, ultimately the broad policy principles around FEC are set by ministers/BEIS although details of implementation within those principles are for UKRI (and other public funders as applicable).</li> <li>vii. Council members concluded that the best way for STFC to mitigate this issue was through its continued engagement with the broader work within UKRI on the sustainability of research. Council members advised STFC colleagues to continue to raise the real concerns of the community around this issue and its potential to damage UK science and encourage UKRI to move forward with this work as quickly as possible.</li> </ul>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Net Zero and energy briefing documents</b>	
	4.1	<p>Council welcomed Liz Fellman (LF), Neil Geddes (NG) and Alan Partridge (AP) to the meeting for this discussion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Following the introductory meeting between Mark Thomson and Paul Monks, BEIS CSA, a series of briefing documents were produced for the STFC Executive Team. These covered Net Zero, Hydrogen Energy, Wind Energy and Medical Isotopes.</li> </ul>

		<p>ii. The documents were initially written to highlight what role STFC has or could potentially have in contributing to the R&amp;D in these areas. Over time, they have evolved into more strategic briefings which STFC plan to share with the new BEIS CSA and other government officials. It was explained that Net Zero was chosen as the first area to be developed given that it is a significant priority for BEIS. Work is in progress to develop the other three areas.</p> <p>iii. LF, NG and AP invited comments from Council members on the draft documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council members felt the briefing documents were well written and well considered and covered all aspects of these developing energy economies. Facilities will have a major role to play in hydrogen storage, catalyst development and developing a smart grid for wind energy.</li> <li>• Council members advised ensuring this work continued to develop in a way that was complementary to other initiatives across UKRI. This work also fits in well with the “Low Regrets” climate change initiative being developed through the BEIS academies. LF confirmed that STFC is working collaboratively with other UKRI Councils, Innovate and EPSRC are particularly supportive. The team will follow up on the suggestion to work with the academies.</li> <li>• Council members recognised that within these initiatives there are great opportunities to collaborate with industry to build capacity and technical expertise. The team welcomed this observation and will ensure developments align with industry.</li> <li>• In summary, Council was very supportive of work to develop this briefing and felt it would be well received by the BEIS CSA and other government officials.</li> </ul>
<b>5.</b>	<b>STFC Estates Strategy</b>	
	5.1	<p>Council welcomed Neil Geddes (NG) and Liz Kitchener (LK) to the meeting for this discussion.</p> <p>i. Liz Kitchener (LK) explained that the development of the STFC Estates Strategy arose from the results of an external conditions survey and the increasing demand on the estate infrastructure to meet current and future scientific needs</p> <p>ii. LK gave an overview of the approach taken to developing the STFC Estates Strategy. Along with the external conditions survey, LK and her team undertook a wide-ranging consultation with staff and facility users to identify the key challenges that would be addressed by the strategy.</p> <p>iii. LK also outlined the key risks to STFC of not having an Estates Strategy. The conditions survey identified a large backlog of required maintenance work, some of which was critical to meet legal health and safety standards. As an example of the impact of not having an estates strategy to plan major maintenance and improvement work, LK referred to the costs of removing asbestos from the site which had run into the millions. A robust strategy will enable this work to be managed in a sensible way and avoid costly “firefighting”.</p>

		<p>iv. Council members were strongly supportive of the development of this strategy and commended LK and her team for the huge amount of work they had undertaken, particularly against the backdrop of a pandemic, to get this far in the process. STFC's estates have a key role in assuring the future success of UK science, Council advised ensuring the strategy emphasised the importance of futureproofing in the long term, 20 rather than 10 years.</p> <p>v. Council commended LK and her team for their work and offered its support in developing the case if required.</p>
<b>Chair: Richard Kenway</b>		
<b>6.</b>	<b><u>Report from the Executive Chair</u></b>	
6.1	<p><b><u>Covid-19 Update</u></b>  Mark Thomson (MAT) gave Council a brief update on STFC's response to the current (as of Jan 2021) Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>i. The UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson called a further period of national lockdown for England which began on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021. STFC's Executive Board are confident that STFC sites have taken all appropriate measures to remain Covid-19 secure despite the challenges presented by the emergence of new strains of the virus. Decisions regarding staff attending STFC sites for operational reasons or for purposes of mental wellbeing continue to be managed at a local level through line management and site controllers.</p> <p>ii. At STFC Operational Alert Level 3 the site remains open although staff are encouraged to continue to work from home unless there is an essential operational or welfare need for them to work onsite. MAT flagged that STFC Operational Alert Levels (which refer to operational capability on its sites) do not directly map to Government Alert Levels (which relate to the prevalence of Covid-19 in the community)</p> <p>iii. STFC's Executive Board regularly review site occupancy numbers and there has been a steady decrease since December, even allowing for the holiday period. STFC expect for numbers to decrease during the lockdown period. Decisions regarding site attendance continue to be taken at departmental level, albeit with more oversight and challenge from Site Controllers and senior managers</p> <p>iv. Council members agreed that STFC's response to operating safely throughout the ongoing challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic had been impressive, with only one possible case of transmission linked to an STFC site throughout the whole crisis. Council members extended sincere thanks to all those involved.</p>	
6.2	<p><b><u>Corporate Update</u></b>  MAT gave an update on Corporate News from STFC and UKRI.</p> <p>i. <b>STFC Chief Operating Officer:</b> Council was delighted to hear that following a tough recruitment round Tom Britten had been appointed to this role and would begin in March 2021. Tom joins STFC from the University of Bath where he was the Commercial Director</p> <p>ii. <b>UKRI Chief Operating Officer:</b> Tim Bianek was appointed to this role and would begin in early February 2021.</p> <p>iii. Council members joined MAT in offering heartfelt congratulations to Sheila Rowan (SR). SR has been appointed Commander of the Order of the British</p>	

		<p>Empire (CBE) for her contribution to one of the most significant scientific breakthroughs of this century, the first detection of gravitational waves announced in February 2016.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>iv. SR will also be taking over as STFC Council's Senior Independent Member (SIM) in April 2021.</li> <li>v. MAT shared the latest developments on STFC's Environmental Sustainability Plan which will be discussed in more detail at the March meeting.</li> <li>vi. Council members were interested to learn more about STFC's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion initiatives and asked to see an overview of these activities.</li> </ul>
6.3		<p><b><u>Funding Update</u></b></p> <p>MAT shared the latest news on STFC's submissions to the Infrastructure Fund and Spending Review and gave an update on the impacts of the EU Exit deal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <b>Infrastructure Fund:</b> The UKRI Board recommended a £1.2bn investment over 12 years in a portfolio of 12 full infrastructure projects and 9 preliminary activities. This included a recommendation to invest in Phase 1 of the Digital Research Infrastructure (DRI) Programme.</li> <li>ii. Council members reviewed the successful and unsuccessful STFC and FSAG proposals. It was noted that R&amp;D programmes toward a science goal were not successful, Council advised taking this onboard when identifying proposals for the next round.</li> <li>iii. In terms of the timetable, a two-phase approach is being proposed for the next round. Phase One (meeting in September 2021) will review five re-submissions from the 2020 process and new preliminary proposals. Phase Two (meeting in Feb/Mar 2022) will review new full proposals. Council agreed this was as sensible approach which recognised the current pressures on research council staff and the academic community.</li> <li>iv. STFC is likely to submit a small number of full proposals to the next round. Council members discussed how STFC could make use of the revised timetable to engage with the community directly and through Science Board and its advisory panels. MAT welcomed this advice and highlighted the intention to use the updated advisory panel roadmaps to identify new preliminary activities.</li> <li>v. <b>Spending Review:</b> Overall, a largely flat settlement for FY21/22 is looking increasingly likely. UKRI and STFC know this will mean having to accommodate a range of financial pressures, making it likely that savings will have to be found next year.</li> <li>vi. <b>New Ventures Fund:</b> BEIS, GO-Science, Treasury and the Cabinet office are currently in discussion to establish a novel funding mechanism for the support of high value research which sits outside traditional funding mechanisms. Details of governance around the New Ventures Fund are yet to be established</li> <li>vii. Council discussed the possible scale and scope of the New Ventures Fund. MAT explained that the initial focus will be on a small number of projects aligned to priorities including transformative technologies, place, innovation,</li> </ul>

		and talent. Council advised STFC to engage with this new fund at an early stage.
6.4	<b><u>Live Issues</u></b>	<p>MAT gave Council an update on a range of the key challenges for STFC. Main discussion points were noted as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <b>Diamond II:</b> There are some ongoing issues with progress on the Business Case which is still with Diamond. STFC need to review the Business Case in detail before it is submitted to BEIS. The project team, led by Alan Partridge, have established good working relationships with their Diamond counterparts, which has kept lines of communication open but there is some frustration over this issue. Council members asked for a report on the process/milestones for the Diamond II Business Case to review at a future meeting. <b>Action: Provide Council with a report on the process/milestones for the Diamond II Business Case</b></li> <li>ii. <b>Advanced Instrumentation Testbed (AIT)-NEO:</b> The estimated costs for this US-led collaboration are based on preliminary designs and appear to be substantially higher than the confirmed funding envelope. The designs of both AIT and NEO are currently being reviewed by the US partners who are seeking to make savings and balance performance, the difficulty of construction and operation. A more detailed update will be available after the review is concluded in Spring 2021.</li> <li>iii. <b>Resourcing:</b> A grade mapping exercise has indicated that similar roles in UKRI can be two grades higher than a similar role in STFC and this has resulted in several key staff moving to UKRI. This particularly affects STFC's Digital Infrastructure and Scientific Computing departments, though there is anecdotal evidence this issue is even more widespread affecting other STFC departments and other Research Councils.</li> <li>iv. Council members felt that this was indicative of a wider concern around the increasing size and scope of the UKRI Centre. Council asked to be kept informed as the situation evolves.</li> </ul>
6.5		<p>MAT shared with Council members some of the many science and innovation highlights for STFC facilities and colleagues. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <b>CoVal Database:</b> (<a href="https://coval.ccpem.ac.uk">https://coval.ccpem.ac.uk</a>) produced by the Scientific Computing Department. The databases is designed to track the evolution of the SARS-Cov2 virus (coronavirus) over time, in terms of genome sequences and structural components of the virus</li> <li>ii. <b>Space Hub:</b> The UK Space Agency has awarded £80,000 to develop a North West Space Hub around Daresbury</li> <li>iii. <b>Apprentice Employer Award:</b> Following a nomination from an employee, STFC has been awarded the Institute of Physics Apprentice Employer Award 2020 (large employer)</li> </ul>

<b>Chair: Mark Thomson</b>		
<b>7</b>	<b>Finance and Governance Update</b>	
	7.1	<p>Council members welcomed Mark Affonso (MA) to the meeting. MA joined RK in giving the update from the most recent Finance and Governance Committee Update;</p> <p>i. The Finance and Governance Committee met on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021. The main discussion points were: STFC's Response to the Coronavirus, Updates on Risk and Finances and an overview of the work of the Business and Innovation Directorate.</p> <p>ii. Council members noted the report and commended the work of MA and team in managing STFC's finances. There had been many challenges to overcome but overall, finances are in good order with clear and robust reporting.</p>
<b>8.</b>	<b>Any other business</b>	
	8.1	<p><u>UKRI Executive Committee Paper- Digital Research Infrastructure (DRI) Strategy</u>  MAT briefly outlined the current thinking for governance of DRI. It is likely the existing body will be retained with the addition of a Strategy Board, DRI Committee and Oversight Committee. This proposal has support, the details still need further consideration.</p>
<b>9.</b>	<b>Closing Remarks</b>	
	<p>MAT thanked members and guests for their contribution. The next meeting will take place by videoconference on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021 and will be attended by the UKRI CEO who will give a presentation on their vision for UKRI.</p>	