



**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board
held at Catalyst Inc. Innovation Centre, Northern Ireland Science Park
on Monday 11 December 2017 at 10.00am**

Present – Board Members

Mr Colm McKenna, Chair	Dr Michelle Costello-Smith	Ms Joan Houston
Prof William McKelvey, Deputy Chair	Ms Theresa Cullen	Mrs Maureen McKeague
Mr Ian Buchanan	Mrs Fiona Hanna	Mrs Sharon Smyth
Mr Colin Coffey	Dr Richard Horton	Mr Richard Solomon

In Attendance - AFBI Executive

Dr Sinclair Mayne, Chief Executive Officer
Dr Stanley McDowell, Director of Veterinary Sciences Division
Dr Elizabeth Magowan, Director of Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division
Mrs Josephine Kelly, Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs Division
Mr Glenn Montgomery, Head of Governance & Performance

Mr James Adams, AFBI Secretariat

Visitor

Mr Steve Orr, Catalyst Inc.

- 1. Welcome and Introduction** **ACTION**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 2. Apologies**

An apology was received from the AFBI Boardroom Apprentice, Ms Jennifer Ritchie.
- 3. Conflict of Interests/Register of Interests Declaration**

There were no conflicts of interest to be recorded.
- 4. Draft Minutes of the AFBI Board Meeting held on 21 September 2017**

The draft minutes from the AFBI Board meeting held on 21 September 2017 were approved as an accurate reflection of the business conducted at the meeting.

 - 4.1 Action Sheet from AFBI Board Meeting held on 21 September 2017**

The Board noted the progress against actions as per the action sheet.

5. Chair's Remarks

ACTION

In providing his remarks the Chair updated the Board on the following matters:-

- The Chair continues to regularly engage with the DAERA Permanent Secretary (PS). The DAERA PS has also been heavily involved in preparations for the UK's exit of the European Union (EU) including the potential implications for the agri-food sector;
- The DAERA PS has confirmed that the Department consider the NIAO/PAC recommendations as implemented. This was agreed on the basis that a strategy on capturing future efficiencies is included in AFBI's Corporate Plan 2018-2021 and that appropriate KPI's relating to the NIAO/PAC recommendations are included in future AFBI's Business Plans;
- The Chair congratulated Mr Colin Coffey on his successful appointment to the position of Deputy Chair of the AFBI Board and his Term of Office will commence on the 1 January 2018. The Chair commented on the excellent pool of candidates who applied for the position, all of which met the criteria for appointment;
- A reserve list for Board members remains open and DAERA have written to potential candidates to ascertain their interest in joining the AFBI Board. The Chair is awaiting feedback.

6. Executive Report

In presenting his Executive Report for the period 19 September– 30 November 2017, the CEO highlighted a number of key activities and items which included the following:-

- The CEO was pleased to attend the launch of the COMPASS INTERREG project on 14th November 2017. This significant project which AFBI leads is an EU INTERREG VA funded project administered by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB);
- CEO, AFBI Chair and Dr Elizabeth Magowan attended the launch of a booklet to mark the 20th Anniversary of AgriSearch on 22 November 2017;
- A series of events were held in November to mark the AFBI Cattle Health Scheme 10 year anniversary in 2017;
- The fifth AFBI initiated International Fall Forum was held in Madison, Wisconsin from 6-10 November 2017. This year's Forum was hosted by the US Department of Agriculture with 52 senior scientists representing Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, USA, Canada and New Zealand attending;
- A very successful 60th George Scott Robertson Memorial Lecture, jointly hosted by AFBI, Queens University Belfast (QUB), DAERA and Ulster Farmers Union (UFU) was held on 16 November 2017. Guest speaker Lord Donald Curry spoke on "*The Future of Farming and Food – Fifteen Years Since the Curry Report*" – to an audience of more than 200 delegates;
- Reviews of the handling and transport of dangerous goods have been completed across all sites by the Dangerous Goods Safety Advisor

(DGSA). An action plan to address recommendations is being developed in conjunction with the DGSA;

ACTION

- The CEO also updated the Board on a number of matters in relation to the AFBI Estate Strategy including the progress of the draft Beef Facilities Outline Business Case (OBC), the Hillsborough Masterplan, the VSD Main Building Project and the completion of the AFBI Hillsborough Nutrient Management Centre;
- In terms of recruitment the CEO advised that the Head of Finance Mr Conor O'Neill is due to commence on 3 January 2018 and a formal offer has been made in relation to the Head of Communications post.

In discussing the area of Health and Safety, the Executive advised that the recruitment competition is underway for a senior Health and Safety Advisor who will undertake a strategic review of Health and Safety. It was also noted that the area of Health and Safety is routinely audited externally as part of the accreditations for ISO17025 and ISO9001.

In terms of the forthcoming AFBI Peer Review of Veterinary Sciences Division, the Deputy Chair suggested that it may be prudent to invite the DAERA Chief Veterinary Officer to a final meeting. Action: Stanley McDowell to take forward

7. Progress Report on DAERA Review of AFBI 2017/18

The Board noted the report on the progress of the DAERA Review of AFBI and that there had been delays on both sides.

The CEO advised that the vast majority of information had been supplied to the DAERA Review Team and the remaining information will be provided by 31st December. In terms of the online questionnaire responses from stakeholders, it was noted that 39 external and 41 internal responses were received. The Review Team is currently analysing the returns and AFBI have formally requested to have sight of all of the responses.

The Board also noted that the wider DAERA Science Transformation Programme, which the DAERA Review of AFBI 2017/18 is a component, had been delayed due to unforeseen staff absence.

8. Progress on AFBI/QUB Discussions

The CEO informed the Board that EMT had held two recent meetings with QUB representatives and the key action is to examine the most appropriate governance arrangements for a strategic alliance. A tender for assistance in benchmarking a number of governance structures has been prepared jointly by AFBI and QUB, and it is proposed that QUB take forward the procurement exercise for this project early in 2018.

In response to a query on educational benefits to the agri-food industry, the CEO said that he sees very significant benefits at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in the longer term.

9. End of Year Review on Delivery of Assigned Work Programme **ACTION**

The Executive informed the Board that it is awaiting the report on the End of Year Review on Delivery of Assigned Work Programme from DAERA and this is expected to be presented at the next Board meeting.

Exec

10. Finance

10.1 AFBI Budget Monitor Report – Position at 31 October 2017

Mrs Kelly presented the “*AFBI Budget Monitor Report - Position as at 31 October 2017*” and the following points were noted:-

- A year-end surplus of £300k is currently forecast and this has been relayed to the Department;
- The additional £1m investment in capital equipment is being closely monitored by the Executive;
- The four-year income forecasts are being closely monitored by the Income Generation Strategy Group and it was noted that the projection of £14.5m in 2018/19 is similar to the current year once adjustment is made for the one off nature of the soils project in 2017/18.

10.2 Quarterly update on new bids and contracts

The Board noted the quarterly report on new bids and contracts. Mrs Kelly also advised that work is ongoing to link the information in the report with future income forecasting.

The Chair asked if the Executive had any concerns regarding unsuccessful bids. In response, the Executive confirmed that, given AFBI’s current success rate and highly competitive environment for this type of funding, it was inevitable that some bids would be unsuccessful. The key issue here was to ensure that staff learnt from the experience and explored opportunities to submit revised, improved proposals.

10.3 Effect of Exchange Rate Movements

The Finance & Business Strategy Committee asked that this paper be presented to the Board for noting.

The Chair stated that the potential impact of exposure to currency exchange rates will be a wider issue for the NI Civil Service. In terms of AFBI, the Executive advised that the soon to be appointed Head of Finance will be tasked with examining the impacts of exchange rates.

11. Audit & Risk Assurance Committee

11.1 Report and Draft Minutes from Audit & Risk Assurance Committee Meeting held on 14 November 2017

The Board noted the minutes from the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee Meeting held on 14 November 2017. Ms Houston highlighted the Committee’s

disappointment that the audited 'Draft AFBI Annual Report and Statement of Accounts 2016/17' had not been provided for the Committee's consideration. **ACTION**

It was also noted that a phased approach over the next three years will see Non Departmental Public Bodies accounts audited in line with core departments. The Committee welcomed the approach especially as it would assist AFBI when tendering for business by having the most recent set of accounts available at the earliest opportunity.

12. Finance & Business Strategy Committee

12.1 Report from Finance & Business Strategy Committee Meeting held on 28 November 2017

In reporting on the Finance & Business Strategy Committee Meeting held on 28 November 2017, Mr Coffey highlighted the following points:-

- £1m had been reallocated to capital investment;
- Costing elements in relation to AFBI's Full Economic Cost (FEC) and how this differs from other comparator organisations was discussed and will be on the agenda of the next Committee meeting;
- The Executive summary of the AFBI IT Strategic Plan was reviewed by the Committee and the Executive was urged to ensure that robust timelines for implementation are included within the plan;
- The draft Budget 2018/19 was discussed and in order to finalise this the Committee has agreed to reschedule its meeting to the 8 March 2018. However, if more time is required to prepare the final budget, Mr Coffey asked the Board to note that the Committee would potentially move to the 15 March 2017 and if this transpires, asked that the March 2018 Board meeting be rearranged.

13. Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee

13.1 Minutes from Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee Meeting held on 11 September 2017

The Board noted the minutes from the Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee Meeting held on 11 September 2017.

13.2 Report from Draft Minutes from Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee Meeting held on 1 November 2017

The Board noted the minutes from the Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee Meeting held on 1 November 2017.

In reporting on both Committee meetings, Ms Cullen highlighted the following main topics of discussion:-

- *AFBI Culture and Organisational Change* – The Committee recognised the level of engagement at EMT and Board level and emphasised the importance that a high level of engagement is filtered down through the organisation;
- *Absenteeism* – The Committee noted the raft of activity being undertaken by AFBI HR to attempt to address levels of absenteeism;

- *Recruitment* – The Committee was pleased to note the enhanced reporting and management of recruitment categories;
- *Learning and Development Strategy* – AFBI develops a succession plan for key individuals and specialised posts and this has been incorporated into the draft Learning & Development Strategy.

ACTION

The Board discussed the progress of the Performance Review Cycle for 2016/17 and noted that the majority of staff appraisals had been completed and the remainder are being actively managed. The Board asked the Executive to review how the statistics are presented, in particular, if incomplete performance reviews beyond the Executive's control could be considered non-applicable rather than incomplete.

Exec

14. Science Strategy Committee

14.1 Report and Draft Minutes from Science Strategy Committee meeting held on 2 November 2017

The Board noted the minutes from the Science Strategy Committee Meeting held on 2 November 2017.

Dr Costello-Smith also brought the following matters to the Board's attention:-

- *Horizon Scanning Group* – The Committee was pleased to note the enthusiasm and passion of the Group as it embarks on the horizon scanning exercise. Dr Costello-Smith also thanked fellow Committee member Dr Horton who attended a Group meetings and provided insight into his knowledge and experience in this area;
- *AFBI Science Programmes* – The Executive continues to progress the implementation of a programme-based approach which will involve cultural and system changes;
- *Peer Review Publications* – The Committee noted that the outturn at the six month period was relatively low in comparison with the target set. While achievement of the KPI will be challenging, the Executive is addressing the matter and ensuring that proper focus is dedicated to this area;
- *Genomics Strategy* – The Committee noted the difficulty in filling two related posts and commended the Executive on its exploration of contingency arrangements. The Committee also asked the Executive to undertake a review of the AFBI Science Strategy.

The Deputy Chair asked if peer review publications are properly incorporated into performance management. In response, the Executive confirmed that this was the case and also pointed out that while this is the first Key Performance Indicator which targets the top 25% of Journals, activity to produce peer review papers is consistent with previous years.

15. Governance Issues

15.1 Risk Management

15.1.1 *Reports of New or Emerging Risks*

There were no new or emerging risks reported.

15.1.2 *Draft AFBI Corporate Risk Register (CRR) (October 2017)*

Mrs Kelly summarised the key changes to the CRR dated October 2017 and the Board was content to approve.

The Chair noted that the Board should set the Risk Appetite of AFBI on an annual basis as part of the review of AFBI's Risk Management Strategy. The subject of risk and risk management will form part of the agenda for a future AFBI Board Strategic Workshop.

Exec

15.2 Whistleblowing and Fraud**15.2.1** *Reports of New or Ongoing Cases*

There were no reports of any new or ongoing cases of whistleblowing or fraud.

15.3 Health & Safety**15.3.1** *Reports of New or Emerging Issues*

There were no new or emerging cases reported.

15.3.2 Health and Safety Review Update

The Board noted that the Executive has received a draft report for the Health and Safety Review and were prioritising a number of recommended actions.

16. **Draft AFBI Equality Scheme Progress Report April – September 2017**

The Board noted the updated AFBI Equality Scheme Progress Report for the period April to September 2017.

17. **AFBI Business Plan 2017/18****17.1** Update on Progress Against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) 2017/18 (Quarters 1 & 2)

In noting the progress of AFBI's Corporate KPIs for the first two quarters of 2017/18, the Board enquired if any KPIs currently attributed with a 'Red' status could be improved. In response, the Executive advised that it will strive to achieve as many KPIs as possible but that a number have been delayed by other factors such as the development of the AFBI Science Programmes and the AFBI Corporate Plan.

The Chair noted that KPI 4 '*Establish programme linked stakeholder fora by September 2017*' is attributed with a 'Red' status and asked that the Executive consider the wording around the update so that, while the KPI has not been achieved, comments should reflect the ongoing improvement in stakeholder engagement.

18. Draft AFBI Corporate Plan 2018-2021 v13 – Update **ACTION**

The CEO presented the latest version of the “*AFBI Corporate Plan 2018-2021*”. The Executive also thanked the AFBI Board members who provided feedback to date and tabled an additional paper which contained both the written comments received from three Board members and the Executive’s responses.

Each comment received from Board members was discussed in detail and further comments and suggestions were also provided during the discussions. Following this, the Board indicated that it was content with the document subject to the proposed changes and it was agreed that changes will be incorporated into the revised version of the Corporate Plan to be presented to DAERA by the 31 December 2017.

Exec

It was also agreed that a draft of the AFBI Business Plan 2018/19 will be presented at the AFBI Board Workshop on 8 February 2018.

Exec

19. Any Other Business

19.1 Proposed Dates for AFBI Board/Strategy Workshop and Sub-Committee Meetings

The Chair informed the Board that he had reviewed the first draft of meeting dates for 2018/19 and confirmed that he would need to rearrange some of the Board dates and that he will do this in conjunction with the incoming Deputy Chair and the CEO.

Chair

19.2 Potential move to paperless Board Meetings

The Board agreed in principle to a move to paperless Board meetings. The Executive will also discuss the matter at its next meeting.

Exec

20. Review of Board Meeting Effectiveness

The Board considered that it had held a very effective meeting.

23. Date of Next AFBI Board Strategy Workshop and AFBI Board Meeting

The next AFBI Board Strategy Workshop will be held on Thursday 8 February 2018, Venue TBC.

The next AFBI Board Meeting will be held on Thursday 15 March 2018 at AFBI Newforge.

24. Professor Bill McKelvey – Completion of Term of Office

At the conclusion of the Board meeting the Chair took the opportunity to mark the occasion of Professor McKelvey’s completion of his Term of Office as the Deputy Chair of the AFBI Board. Mr McKenna thanked the Deputy Chair for the support he had provided, to both him and the previous Chair, during his six year tenure. He also remarked on how the Deputy Chair’s leadership, counsel, support and industry knowledge had been vitally important to him and the AFBI Board and wished him every success in the future.

In response, Professor McKelvey stated that it had been a great pleasure to take on this role and he has observed how AFBI has developed into a strong organisation. He congratulated the AFBI Chair on building strong relationships with DAERA and other AFBI stakeholders and commented on the CEO's knowledge and standing within the industry and how this is of great benefit to AFBI. In conclusion, he wished AFBI every success in the future and also congratulated AFBI Board member, Mr Colin Coffey on his appointment to the position of Deputy Chair.

Presentation of Long Service Certificates

After a break for lunch the Chair presented Long Service Certificates to Dr Jim McNair who retired from AFBI on 31 October 2017 after 46 years of service and Mr Sandy Rankin who will retire on 31 January 2018 after 46 years of service. Prior to the presentation of each certificate the Chair provided the Board with a brief synopsis of their careers. The Board wished them well in their retirement and the CEO also highlighted their positive impact on AFBI and thanked them for their long and dedicated service throughout their distinguished careers.

Presentation by Steve Orr, Catalyst INC.

The Board welcomed Mr Steve Orr, Catalyst Inc. who provided a presentation on the establishment of Catalyst INC., its key principles and current model as well as describing how it is envisaged to evolve in its second phase to 2030.

Mr Orr stated that they are looking at areas which they believe they can complete on the global stage and provided examples where a co-located, community driven innovators and adopting an integrated approach have proven to be key factors to success.

The Chair thanked Mr Orr for giving his time to speak with the AFBI Board and Executive Management Team and stated that the presentation had provided useful ideas on how AFBI could progress including the scope of possibilities.

Signed: _____
(Chairperson)

Date: _____