

Minutes of the 204th Meeting of the Board of InterTradeIreland, the Trade and Business Development Body

Tuesday 26th May 2020 — via Teleconference Call (09:30am – 10.30am)

Present via Teleconference Call:

Board Members:

Mr Ken Nelson MBE Chairman
Ms Florence Bayliss
Mr Micheál Briody
Mr Paul Greenfield
Ms Adrienne McGuinness
Ms Ann Rudden

Executive:

Mr Aidan Gough	Designated Officer
Ms Margaret Hearty	Assistant Designated Officer
Mr Martin Agnew	Corporate Services Director
Ms Alayne Kinver	Assistant Director of Strategy and Policy
Mr Alan Morrow	Assistant Director of Operations
Ms Nicola Quinn	Finance Manager (acting as Board Secretary)

204.01 Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Timothy Cairns, Mr James Spratt and Ms Orla McGlennon. Mr Micheál Briody advised that he would be leaving the meeting at 10am.

204.02 Opening Remarks

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting. He confirmed that all Board meetings and Sub Committee meetings would continue to be held remotely until such meetings can again be held in the ITI offices.

For all key matters and decisions, the Chairman advised that he would invite each member individually to comment/ raise questions and indicate approval where required.

204.03 Conflict of Interest

The Chairman declared a potential conflict of interest arising from his position as CEO of LEDCOM, which is a member organisation of Enterprise Northern Ireland and is involved in the delivery of the Co-Innovate programme. Mr Greenfield declared a potential conflict of interest arising from his position

as a member of the Peace IV Working Group. Mr Briody also declared a potential conflict of interest arising from his position as CEO of Silver Hill Foods, which is involved with the Co-Innovate programme. Ms Ann Rudden declared a potential conflict of interest arising from her position as founder and MD of Áine Hand Made Chocolates which is a participant on the Co-Innovate programme. No other conflicts were declared.

204.04 April 2020 Board Minutes

The minutes of the 28th April 2020 Board meeting were agreed as a true record of the meeting and were unanimously approved by the Board. They would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

204.05 Matters Arising

No matters arising were noted.

204.06 Chairman's Business

The Chairman thanked Board members and staff for their work, support and flexibility during the current circumstances. He had viewed the recent Covid-19 webinars hosted by the Body, and noted the excellent content of these.

204.07 Designated Officer Report

Mr Gough provided an update on the Body's funding allocation for the 2020/21 financial year and reported on the Emergency Business Solutions and E-merge supports.

In response to a question from Florence Bayliss, Ms Hearty advised that the new Covid supports were initially promoted to existing ITI programme participants, followed by those who had recently completed projects with ITI, before being offered publicly to businesses trading on a cross border basis. They have been promoted at the recent ITI webinars, which has enabled contact with SMEs new to the Body.

Mr Gough further noted that other ITI programmes had been repurposed in response to Covid. The EU Horizon 2020 programme has recently announced a Covid-response call for applications, and ITI is working to develop cross-border partnerships for this. The most recent All Island Innovation Programme (AIIP) webinar initiative involved 120 participants, whereas a traditional masterclass event would have only had the capacity to cater for c.20 attendees. It will be important for the Body to build on the new way of working, which is consistent with the proposals set out in the Corporate Plan in relation to digitalisation. ITI will be looking strategically at how the Body moves forward in the Covid recovery phase, particularly with Brexit beginning to resurface as an important issue.

Mr Gough reported that he had recently briefed the Committee for the Economy in Northern Ireland on cross-border trading trends, ITI activities and performance. The Committee was satisfied that the Body is taking appropriate action in relation to Covid supports for SMEs.

Mr Gough confirmed that the Body is successfully delivering its activities whilst working remotely. Management will continue to be guided by public health advice and will create a safe environment for returning to work in the office when this time comes.

The Chairman highlighted three issues contained in Mr Gough's report, on which he would like to have a wider discussion at the next meeting, namely ongoing plans for returning to office work when appropriate, the delivery of the Body's supports, and Brexit.

The Chairman thanked Mr Gough for his update and the Board noted the Designated Officer's report.

204.08 Board Sub Committee Reports

Trade Sub Committee Report

Mr Greenfield reported back from the online Trade Sub Committee meeting held on 28th April 2020. He advised that ten new Acumen applications were assessed, nine were approved and one deferred. Mr Greenfield advised that nine new applications would be reviewed by the Committee following the Board meeting.

The Board noted the Trade Sub Committee report and the Chairman thanked Mr Greenfield for his update.

204.09 For Consideration, Discussion and Noting.

Operations Directorate Progress and Activity Report

Ms Hearty presented the Operations Directorate Progress and Activity Report. She highlighted the significant increase in demand for the two new Covid supports and reported that feedback from SMEs has been very positive with many businesses creating an online presence for the first time.

Other ITI programme activity is continuing, albeit some in a different format, for example mentoring and workshops. The Body is endeavouring to be flexible in areas such as public tendering, where an SME can now proceed directly to the mentoring support stage. The fact that nine Acumen and eight Fusion projects are being considered for approval at Sub Committee meetings after this Board meeting is evidence of the continuing demand for programmes, and graduates and sales representatives continue to be appointed to supported Acumen and Fusion SMEs. Some projects are being put 'on hold', which will impact on the profiling of budgets, however it is expected that overall, expenditure will be on budget for the year. Applications continue to be received for Brexit Advisory Service supports.

Ms Hearty reported that the recent Covid webinars were well received. A new series of webinars is now being considered which may relate to the area of public tendering, where there is a need to provide advice to SMEs regarding new opportunities and also how to deliver existing contracts in different ways. The method of delivering Meet the Buyer events is also being reviewed.

The Board noted the Operations Directorate Progress and Activity Reports and the Chairman thanked Ms Hearty for her update.

Mr Briody left the meeting.

Co-Innovate Programme Update

Mr Gough advised that the Programme Monitoring Committee meeting had recently been held. He noted that the Co-Innovate programme had reacted promptly to the Covid crisis with the development and launch of the 'Hero Shield' project involving a cluster of 20 businesses. This project has been welcomed by SEUPB.

He advised that SEUPB recognise the efforts of the Co-Innovate partners in working towards the targets, and acknowledge that projects are currently being put 'on hold' due to Covid. It has been agreed that SEUPB will be flexible regarding the types of projects which can be funded under Strand 4. The ITI Co-Innovate team is reviewing the programme at present to redefine activities where necessary to ensure programme objectives will be achieved, given the current circumstances.

The Board noted the Co-Innovate Programme Update.

Governance and Financial Matters

Mr Agnew presented the Governance and Financial Matters report. He updated the Board on the main elements of the Body's business continuity planning and Covid 19 response, and confirmed that IT systems are working well in supporting remote working by staff. Mr Agnew referred to the recent Pathway to Recovery guidance from the NI Executive which refers to the working environment in Steps 1, 3 and 5 with remote working still being strongly encouraged at Step 5. A detailed risk assessment has been undertaken in respect of the office infrastructure and the current design and layout will accommodate any adaptations which are required. Planning is ongoing to ensure that the ITI offices will continue to comply with guidance at the appropriate time.

Mr Agnew advised that the external audit is progressing well and that the findings of the recent internal audit on the Co-Innovate programme were positive..

He provided an overview of the Body's financial out-turn to April and noted that whilst there are underspends on certain programmes, these are expected to be offset by expenditure on the new Covid supports, such that overall expenditure should be on target.

In respect of funding, Mr Agnew reported that the Body has good relationships with its Sponsor Depts, both of which have been very supportive in the current circumstances.

Mr Agnew advised that the two Depts are currently working on revisions to the Body's Financial Memorandum and it is anticipated that the delegated expenditure limits will be increased.

The Board noted the Governance and Financial Matters report. The Chairman thanked Mr Agnew for his report.

Tenders and Variations to Letters of Offer/Appointment

Mr Agnew noted that there are no requests for permission to go to tender, or for variations to Letters of Offer/Appointment.

Communications Update

Mr Agnew provided an update on recent Communications activity including media relations, social media and website metrics and outlined the role of the Communications team in supporting Covid 19 activities and the Body’s supports. He noted that the Body’s communications activities were focusing on ITI as an organisation and its key message that ITI can assist businesses in a range of ways.

The Body has worked closely with both Government Departments’ communications teams to ensure a consistent messaging approach. The importance of promoting positive business initiatives and outcomes during the pandemic was agreed, and Mr Agnew confirmed that such communications activity is currently being developed.

The Board noted the Communications Report and the communications strategy to date and the Chairman thanked Mr Agnew for his update.

Business Plan Budget Variance and Milestone Exception Report

Ms Kinver presented the Business Plan Budget Variance and Milestone Exception Report and noted minor variances which are all attributable to Covid. The Board noted the reports.

204.10 AOB

The Chairman advised that the next Board meeting should be held remotely via a videoconferencing platform such as Zoom with an audio option.

..... Authorised by
Mr Ken Nelson
Chairman, InterTradeIreland

.....2020