

Minutes of the 203rd Meeting of the Board of InterTradeIreland, the Trade and Business Development Body

Tuesday 28th April 2020 — via Teleconference Call (09:30am – 10.20am)

Present via Teleconference Call:

Board Members:

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

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 Orla McGlennon Board Secretary

203.01 Apologies

No apologies were received.

203.02 Opening Remarks

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting in these extraordinary circumstances via conference call.

Due to the nature of teleconferencing, 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.

203.03 Conflict of Interest

The Chairman asked members to declare any conflicts of interest relating to today's agenda. Mr Nelson 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.

203.04 March 2020 Board Minutes

The minutes of the 31st March 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.

203.05 Matters Arising

Mr Gough advised that Ms Hearty had passed on the Board's thanks to all staff involved in the Venture Capital Conference.

203.06 Chairman's Business

The Chairman reported that he had sent a message to staff on behalf of the Board, thanking them for their work, support and flexibility in the midst of the current environment. He advised that he was in regular contact with Senior Leadership team.

203.07 Designated Officer Report

Mr Gough reported that he had received notification of the Body's budget from DfE for 2020– 2021 amounting to £2.8m (excluding pension costs). A further £910k of EU Exit funding had also been allocated by DfE to the Body. He advised that a comprehensive re-appraisal and re-profiling of programme expenditure is being carried out on an on-going basis.

Mr Gough reported that the Body is fulfilling its role and functions in these unprecedented times and he commended the commitment, flexibility and support of all staff. He referenced the work of the Co Innovate team who have been active in adapting Strand 5 of the programme to address the current needs, particularly in the area of health and are currently working with large companies and SMEs who are collaborating to produce personal protective equipment.

Mr Gough referenced the new pilot initiatives approved by the Board in March to support cross border traders during the Covid 19 recovery period:

- E-merge On Line Sales Support for cross border traders;
- Emergency Business Scheme for cross border traders; and
- Covid 19 Innovation Response Map

Media interest in the Response Map was significant and Mr Gough reported that he had been interviewed on Good Morning Ulster and RTE ran a feature on businesses listed on the new platform. The Board were informed of the adjustments to current programmes and supports to meet the needs of companies in the current environment. The All Island Innovation Programme is being adapted to an online platform with international experts giving advice on business model innovation, preparing to scale in a crisis and building innovation partnerships. He updated the Board on Synergy Supports

for cross border collaborations and clusters to address health care based needs and supply in relation to Covid 19.

An outline of a strategic supply chain research project was given by Mr Gough. He advised that it is proposed to undertake research to identify the all island supply chain potential for strategically important goods and services. Further information on this initiative will be presented to the Board at the earliest opportunity. Mr Gough also reported on an all island skills barometer which will highlight the skills growth areas, future skills needs and skills deficit areas to ensure that appropriate skills are available to support the market during the recovery.

Despite the postponement of the quarterly All Island Business Monitor, to avoid an additional burden on businesses at this challenging time, an online survey was conducted to 100 SMEs to ascertain the effects of Covid 19 on companies to date. The survey confirms the negative impact on trade and business development to date.

The Board discussed the Designated Officer's report and highlighted the importance of the Body liaising with other relevant agencies on the island to ensure no overlap or duplication of activities. A staged approach to the new initiatives was recommended.

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

203.08 Board Sub Committee Reports

Innovation Sub Committee Report

Mr Spratt reported back from the Innovation Sub Committee meeting held via teleconference call on 31st March 2020. Seven new Fusion applications were considered. Six applications were approved (one of these following clarification) and one was deferred. In addition, one project deferred at the February meeting was approved.

The Board noted the Innovation Sub Committee report and the Chairman thanked Mr Spratt for his report.

Trade Sub Committee Report

Mr Greenfield reported back from the online Trade Sub Committee meeting held on 31st March 2020. He advised that eleven new Acumen applications were assessed, ten were approved and one deferred. Two deferrals from the February meeting were approved and an appeal to a previous rejection was reviewed and upheld. Mr Greenfield advised that ten new applications would be reviewed by the Committee following the Board meeting. The Chairman noted the continued demand for the Acumen programme.

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

203.09 For Consideration, Discussion and Noting.

Operations Directorate Progress and Activity Report

Ms Hearty presented the Operations Directorate Progress and Activity Report. She highlighted aspects of her report giving an update on the two new programmes which have been well received. Over 60 applications have been made to the E-merge pilot programme which supports businesses to organise an online sales platform. The Emergency Business Solutions programme offers a wide variety of support including dealing with HR issues, accessing Government supports as well as changing production methods and over 30 applications have been received to date. These supports help businesses currently on our programmes and those completed within the last 12 months in a very practical way. Ms Hearty informed the Board that the Executive is planning to extend these vouchers to cross border traders in line with the approval of budgets by the Board. She gave an update on the comprehensive publications detailing all Covid 19 Government supports available to businesses North and South which are available on our website. Ms Hearty advised that following a competitive tender exercise, PKF/FPM will deliver a series of six webinars which will be rolled out over the next month giving strategic advice, detailing all government supports and how to access them, as well as wider banking and other sources of finance.

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

Co-Innovate Programme Update

The Board noted the Co-Innovate Programme Update as presented in the Board papers.

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. Payments to suppliers and businesses supported by InterTradeIreland are being processed on a flexible and more frequent basis which has been widely welcomed. Both the external and internal audits are progressing remotely.

Mr Agnew gave an overview of the Body's financial out-turn and advised that the Executive carry out regular monthly reviews of budgets and expenditure. Mr Agnew advised that DFE has allocated £2.8m (excl pension costs) to the Body for 2020 from its 2020/21 financial year allocation and advised that the Body had also received £910k from DFE's January monitoring round bid in respect of EU Exit funds.

Mr Briody enquired about monitoring budgets and spend on a regular basis to mitigate against the risk of a possible underspend/overspend. The Board were informed that monthly reviews and re-profiling are being carried out by Programme Managers and that the Body were closely monitoring all programme spend and liaising closely with Departments around funding.

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 sought Board approval to extend and vary the cost to the current Go-2-Tender Managing Agent contract. He advised that a procurement exercise was recently carried out through CPD to appoint a Managing Agent to deliver Phase 8 of the Programme. There were no tenders submitted that met the minimum requirements and the competition was ended. Mr Agnew reported that given the unprecedented impact of Covid 19 and to ensure a continuity of services, a contract extension is being sought. He advised that the Body will continue to work with CPD and should be in a position to re-tender the procurement competition in the near future. The Chairman invited each Board member individually to comment/raise questions and indicate approval. The Board unanimously approved the extension of the current Go-2-Tender Managing Agent’s contract until 31st December 2020.

The Board also unanimously approved the request to extend the contract for the Body’s Internal Audit Services for an additional three months at no additional cost.

The Chairman thanked Mr Agnew for his report.

Communications Update

Mr Agnew provided an update on recent Communications activity including media relations, social media and website metrics. He advised that the Communications team are significantly involved in supporting activities related to the emerging Covid 19 crisis and the Body’s various responses. The Body has liaised closely with both Government Departments’ communications teams to ensure a joined-up messaging approach. Website content has been developed and updated, supported by social media activity across all platforms.

The Board noted the Communications Report, and in particular the Body’s communications approach at this time, 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 which the Board noted.

203.10 AOB

Ms Rudden advised of the need to have a contingency plan in the event of the uncertain uptake of applicants to ITI programmes.

.....Authorised by

Mr Ken Nelson
Chairman, InterTradeIreland

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