

Minutes of the 201st Meeting of the Board of InterTradeIreland, the Trade and Business Development Body.

Tuesday 25th February 2020 – InterTradeIreland (08:30am – 10.05am)

Present:

Board Members:

Mr Ken Nelson MBE Chairman
Mr Micheál Briody
Mr Timothy Cairns
Mr Paul Greenfield

Observers:

Ms Florence Bayliss

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

201.01 Apologies

Apologies have been received from Ms Ann Rudden, Mr James Spratt and Ms Adrienne McGuinness.

201.02 Opening Remarks

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting. He advised as the Board was not quorate, the Board would be provided today with updates for information only.

The Chairman asked that the Board's best wishes be passed to Mr Spratt.

201.03 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 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.

No other conflicts were declared.

201.04 28th January 2020 Board Minutes

The minutes of the 28th January 2020 Board meeting were reviewed by the Board and they agreed they are a true record of the meeting and would be ratified at the next quorate Board meeting.

201.05 Matters Arising

Mr Gough advised that the Board's appreciation had been passed on to staff and Mr Ryan would provide the Board with an update on Co-Innovate Strand 4, later in the meeting.

201.06 Chairman's Business

The Chairman reported that Ms Bayliss and Ms McGuinness's appointments are yet to be ratified by the NSMC and it was still uncertain when the next NSMC meeting would take place.

He reported that he had attended the Chartered Accountants Ireland annual dinner in Dublin at the end of January and would be attending the Chartered Accountants Ulster Society annual dinner on 5th March in Belfast. The Chairman advised that he is due to meet with Minister Dodds along with Mr Gough and Ms Hearty on Thursday 27th February and would be given the opportunity to update the Minister on the work of the Body and discuss the draft Corporate Plan.

The Chairman thanked Mr Morrow for his participation at a recent event he had attended organised by a Fusion company from Larne at which there had been great engagement at a local level.

Board members were invited to attend the Pre Venture Capital Conference Dinner on 4th March and the Venture Capital Conference on 5th March. Mr Greenfield advised that he would attend the Pre Conference dinner on behalf of the Board.

201.07 Designated Officer Report

Mr Gough advised that following the recent election in Ireland, a new Government has yet to be formed which is affecting the scheduling of NSMC Plenary and Sectoral meetings at which decisions on Board appointments were to be taken. Both administrations are conscious of the urgency of this issue and options are under consideration to approve existing nominees at the earliest opportunity.

Mr Gough highlighted the work of Ms Gráinne Lennon in our new practical approach to the development of all island clusters in specific sectors, as prioritised in the new Corporate Plan. He reported on her work to connect the Life and Health Science network in Northern Ireland and the West of Ireland which will include the facilitation of a trade mission to Galway by Northern Ireland stakeholders on 6th and 7th May 2020 at which workshops will assist SMEs to sell into MNC's supply chains.

The Board were updated on work by the Senior Leadership Team to develop plans to take forward the ten critical actions that will support our new strategic approach as outlined in the 2020 – 2022 Corporate Plan.

- Implement a 3 year multi annual research plan;
- Set targets to review criteria for existing programmes to align with new priorities and areas of focus;
- Implement a new Personal Development Strategy;
- Develop initiatives to support the development of all-island Clusters;
- Develop a Digitalisation and Data Analytics Plan;
- Achieve IIP Gold Standard;
- Achieve a Customer Service Excellence accreditation;
- Develop a new set of Supplementary Performance Indicators;
- Develop a new Communication Plan; and
- Develop a new CSR action plan.

Mr Gough advised that he had recently met with the heads of the IOD and CBI in Northern Ireland; the EU's Task Force who are negotiating the future trading relationships with the UK, officials from Invest N.I. and the Department of International Trade in the UK Embassy in Dublin. He informed the Board of a forthcoming meeting with the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and the Small Firms Association (SFA) to discuss areas of mutual co-operation.

The Chairman commented that the new Corporate Plan is well aligned with the strategies of other agencies on the island including Invest N.I. as discussed at a recent meeting with their officials.

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

201.08 Board Sub Committee Reports

Innovation Sub Committee Report

Mr Morrow reported back from the Innovation Sub Committee meeting held on 28th January 2020. Nine new FUSION applications were considered, eight were approved and one was deferred. He advised that many of the recent applications were from priority areas identified in the new Corporate Plan including I4.0 technologies, Bio Economy and Data Analytics.

The Chairman commented on the large volume and sectoral spread of applications to the Fusion programme.

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

Trade Sub Committee Report

Mr Greenfield reported back from the Trade Sub Committee meeting held on 28th January 2020. He advised that twenty new Acumen applications were assessed, eighteen were approved, one deferred and one rejected. An appeal to a previous rejection was reviewed and the decision upheld. The quality and volume of the applications recommended for support was commended.

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

201.09 For Consideration, Discussion and Noting.

Operations Directorate Progress and Activity Report

Ms Hearty presented the Operations Directorate Progress and Activity Report. She advised that there continues to be a strong pipeline for all programmes and the challenge is to manage budgets, emphasising that in many instances, projects approved in this financial year will incur expenditure next year. The importance of securing additional funds was highlighted.

Ms Hearty reported on the forthcoming outreach activity including our representation at the National Enterprise Week events scheduled for the 1st week in March, which will involve staff giving presentations and participation on panel discussions. She reported on the on-going demand for our involvement on judging panels at various Business Awards including the FSB and Irish Exporters Association.

Ms Hearty gave an update on the Brexit Advisory Service with staff currently focussing on developing digital content. There will be a strategic focus on supply chain issues and although voucher funding will not be actively promoted until details of the new trade deal emerge, the scheme remains open. Ms Hearty

reported that the team are involved in conducting a series of meetings with service providers and updating the webpage content.

Mr Briody asked Ms Hearty if the Executive had any plans or supports available to businesses in respect of the UK's proposed new immigration policies. Ms Hearty agreed to discuss this with the Brexit team.

Ms Hearty informed the Board that the Executive are working with CPD to develop tender documentation for a delivery agent for the next phase of the Go-2-Tender programme with the new programme expected to commence in June 2020. Approvals for the Fusion Phase VI programme and economic appraisal is progressing, with a DfE Casework Committee scheduled for 26th March.

Ms Hearty reported that a Network and Facilitation Manager for the Innova programme has been recruited and has been tasked to identify potential opportunities and focus on priority sectors highlighted in the new Corporate Plan.

The Venture Capital Conference has received 214 registrations to date and a sell-out is anticipated. Ms Hearty advised that feedback from the Equity Advisory Clinics and the work of our Lead Equity Advisor, Mr Drew O'Sullivan has been extremely positive.

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

Co-Innovate Programme Update

Mr Neil Ryan, Co-Innovate Director joined the Board meeting for this agenda item and provided an update on the progress made on Strand 4 of the Co-Innovate Programme. He advised that extensive work has been done in the past month on Strand 4. This has included the recruitment of consultants to generate high potential leads and assist SMEs through to application submission. Mr Ryan reported that the LEAP (Linking Experts, Academia and Projects) campaign has been launched via emailers, flyers, social media and press to promote Strand 4 and will run for the next 5 – 6 months. Five information sessions to target companies directly to Strand 4 and 5 have been arranged with three already having taken place. Feedback from the 56 participants attending to date has been very positive. Mr Ryan reported that a promotional media case study video has been completed.

To date, there have been 4 Strand 5 (B2B projects) approved and these account for 8 SMEs against a final target of 30. Mr Ryan advised that the approved business cases to date would account for 28 against this target, if all were approved.

A response to the request to SEUPB for a nine-month extension to the programme is anticipated at the end of Q1 2020. Mr Ryan reported that the Sponsoring Departments have indicated their support for this.

The Board discussed and it was agreed that progress has been made.

The Board noted the Co-Innovate Programme report and the Chairman thanked Mr Ryan for his update.

Ms Kinver and Mr Ryan gave a presentation on the Peace Plus Programme. Ms Kinver advised that this programme will follow on from the current Peace and INTERREG VA programme and will run from 2021 to 2027. SEUPB are currently carrying out a stakeholder engagement exercise including a detailed questionnaire which is due to complete on 28th February 2020. Sponsoring Departments have indicated their support for the Body's role in the new programme. Ms Kinver outlined the policy objectives of the new programme including:

- **A Smarter Europe** by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation;
- **A Green, Low-Carbon Europe** by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation, risk prevention and management;
- **A More Connected Europe** by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity;
- **A More Social Europe** implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights; and
- **A Europe Closer to its Citizen** by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural, coastal areas and local initiatives.

Ms Kinver reported that aspects of the new programme align with our current Corporate Plan, particularly in the areas of SME productivity, Industry 4.0, cluster development and transitioning to a low carbon economy. Although it is too early for specific programmes to be known yet, the survey provides the Body with an opportunity to influence the programme going forward.

The Chairman thanked Ms Kinver and Mr Ryan for their update.

Q4 2019 Business Monitor Results

Ms Curran, Policy Research Manager and Ms Nicola McGuinness, Project Information and Research Manager joined the Board meeting for this agenda item.

Ms Curran commented on the significant engagement by the media and the reach via social media platforms on the latest Business Monitor results and thanked the Communications team for their input. She reported that the latest results reveal that the business environment remains resilient with 44 % of firms across the island in growth mode, while 42% are stable. Worrying signs for small firms continues this quarter with 33% of micro enterprises reporting that they are just breaking even at best. Ms Curran advised that just under a third of businesses are operating below capacity and the percentage of firms working at or close to full capacity has fallen by 14% this quarter. Recruiting staff is a growing concern and in particular, large firms are reporting a lack of appropriate skills available in the workforce.

Ms Curran reported on the positive news this quarter with investment figures on the rise in areas such as marketing, upgrading of equipment and systems, R&D and staff training. 27% of businesses plan to invest in their staff in the year ahead and it is hoped that this trend continues.

The InterTradeIreland Corporate Plan is committed to supporting businesses in moving towards a low carbon economy. Ms Curran advised that 57% of firms placed an importance in moving towards a low carbon future and 70% see skills as an enabler to the energy transition.

The Board were informed of the significant Advertising Value Equivalent of Q4 2019 media coverage of over £660k. N.I. coverage included BBC Newsline coverage, radio and online, the Belfast Telegraph and Irish News. Ireland coverage include RTE online, the Irish Times, Newstalk and regional radio. Ms Curran thanked her team, Mr Gough for his participation on the Good Morning Ulster radio interview and the assistance of the Communications team.

The Board discussed the Business Monitor results and commended the work of this evidence based, statistically robust information.

The Board noted the All Island Business Monitor results for Q4 2019 and the Chairman thanked Ms Curran and Ms McGuinness for their work in this area.

Governance and Financial Matters

Mr Agnew presented the Governance and Financial Matters report. He advised that interim audit work has been undertaken by the N.I. Audit Office during February with the final audit fieldwork due to commence at the end of March. The draft year end accounts to be audited and included in the Annual Report and the proposed Audit Strategy is due to be reviewed by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at its meeting following the Board meeting.

Mr Agnew reported that the internal auditors have completed an audit of payroll policies and procedures and a 'satisfactory' assurance rating was awarded.

There has been no significant development on addressing the issue of Board appointments and the matter is unlikely to be resolved until an NSMC meeting has taken place. It was agreed that the matter should continue to be raised with NSMC and Sponsoring Departments.

All Board members were asked to submit their Statement of Interests form to the Finance Manager as soon as possible.

Mr Agnew gave an overview of the Body's financial out-turn. The 2017, 2018 and 2019 Business Plans have yet to be approved. It is anticipated that these will be approved at the next NSMC meeting.

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 advised that there were no requests to go to tender or variations to letters of appointment.

Communications Update

Mr Agnew provided an update on recent Communications activity. He asked the Board to note the new format of the report which is aimed at focusing on areas where communications bring value to the Body including media relations, Advertising Value Equivalence (AVE) social website metrics and events. Software has been introduced which enables the Communications team to issue press releases directly to media outlets across the island.

Mr Agnew gave an update on the significant media relations coverage generated in January 2020. He advised that the potential reach of any social media content referencing InterTradeIreland was 2.5m with 3,800 interactions. Visitors to our website continue to grow with almost 7,000 visits during January with an average session duration of 2.3 minutes and an improved bounce rate of 56%. This would indicate that our content continues to be relevant and engaging.

Staff recently undertook LinkedIn training which is being used to promote the various programmes. Mr Agnew highlighted the excellent regional press and radio coverage generated by the recent Fusion Exemplars event in Dundalk. He also commented on the noteworthy coverage of the latest results of the Business Monitor which continues to be a very well recognised report, that accurately captures and portrays conditions and issues facing the business community.

The Board noted the Communications Report 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 advised that there were no budget variances and all milestones were on target.

The Chairman thanked Ms Kinver for her report and the Board noted the Business Plan Budget Variance and Milestone Exception Report.

201.10 AOB

The Chairman advised that a Board meeting could be held later in the year in Belfast and Dublin when the Board were quorate.

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

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